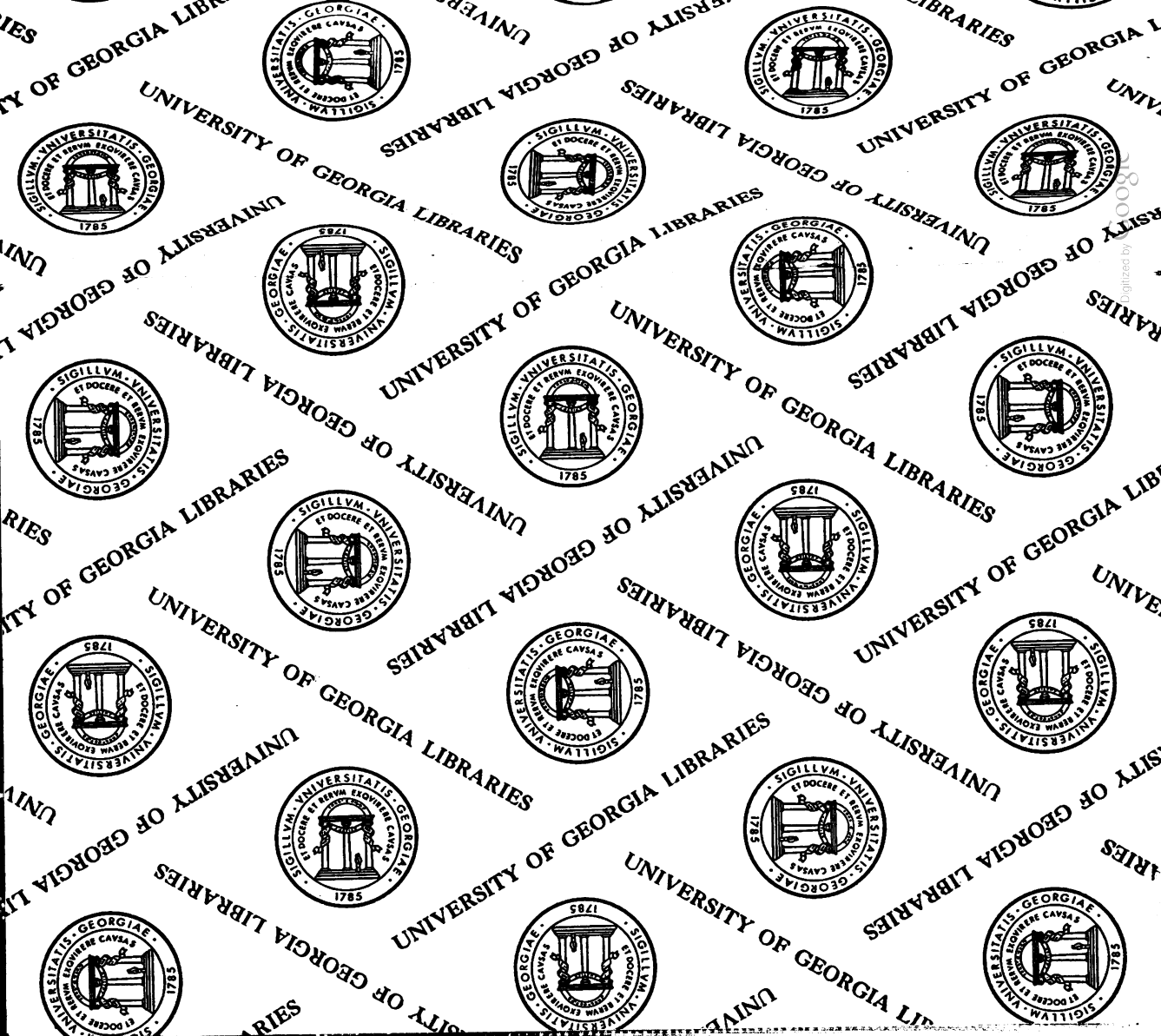
This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

Google™ books

https://books.google.com

Digitized by Google


UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA LIBRARIES
SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · GEORGIAE
ET DOCERE ET RERVM EXQVIRERE CAVSAS
1785

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA LIBRARIES

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE LUCK OF THE STRONG

Digitized by Google

Copyrighted

1912
1914
1914
1914
1914
1914
1914
1914

By William Hope Hodgson
In the United States of America.

Copyrighted in Great Britain.
All rights reserved.

Digitized by Google

THE LUCK OF THE STRONG

"The luck of the Strong,
Lawful or Lawless, a glamorous throng
Who haunt the strange Coasts of Adventure.

Some vile as Hell, some tinctured of Heaven,
A medley of souls, stressed with a wild leaven."

"The Adventurers."

BY

WILLIAM HOPE HODGSON

Author of "The Boats of the 'Glen Carrig,'" "The House on the Borderland," "The Ghost Pirates," "The Night Land," "Carnacki the Ghost Finder," "Men of the Deep Waters," etc.

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH COMPANY
LIMITED
1916

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

PAGE

POEM: THE PIRATES vi

1. CAPTAIN GUNBOLT CHARITY AND THE PAINTED LADY 9

2. CAPTAIN JAT. THE ISLAND OF THE UD 42

3. CAPTAIN JAT. THE ADVENTURE OF THE HEADLAND . 75

4. THE GETTING EVEN OF "PARSON" GUYLES . . . 107

5. D.C.O. CARGUNKA. THE BELLS OF THE "LAUGHING SALLY" 146

6. D.C.O. CARGUNKA. THE ADVENTURE WITH THE CLAIM JUMPERS 187

7. WE TWO AND BULLY DUNKAN 230

8. THE STONE SHIP 274

POEM: THE SHIP 317

Digitized by Google

TO
B.

THE UNIVERSITY
LIBRARIES
OF GEORGIA
Digitized by Google

THE PIRATES

The roll of the ships
And the thud of bare feet on the deck!
See the flames tower
Over to larboard
Over to starboard
Where the tall ships are sinking
And the black water is winking
As it thinks
As it blinks
At the roar of our jinks,
Aoi! foot it, my lads,
Aoi! foot it
Aoi! bust it
The whole deck of her
Make her bounce
Hark to her timbers a-creak,
Lord what a time!
Drink to the joy of our life
Never a crime!
Only a rhyme
On the lip of the sea
Hic! Hark unto me
A-poeting
A-goating
Along with the rest of you.
Dance, damn you, dance!
Aoi! see the blue night
Rolling as mad as us
Cuss, devils, cuss
Lord! what a jolly mad fight
What blood
And what doings
What cud
And what rueings
For odd times in future,

Digitized by Google

What a night!
Aoi! what a night for a prance,
With the wood battle-fires on our decks
And the flames of our wrecks,
Dance, oh you lubbers,
You cockfighters
You grubbers
For gold!
Aoi! dance till the wash of the ocean
Beats back from our sides
Dance till she rolls,
Death's blasted black pendulum,
Between the two poles.
Aoi! we're bad and we're bold
Dieu! what a grand notion
Aoi! feel the glad motion
And the thud of your hoofs, old jollies,
Around and about on the decks,
Make her drum
Like the fists of old Satan
On the walls of far heaven
Bumble-drum,
Drumble-bum,
Let her go. Let her go!
Dance! All the gods damn you,
Dance! Drink and dance
Prance, you sons of Satan, prance
Make the rounded decks to drum
(Hear me!)
Till she rolls the scuppers under,
Bumble-drum
Make her hum
Gods of Thunder, yelp and wonder
See us make her bounce and wander. . . .
Make her heave and roll
Send her wash across the whole black ocean
Till God rocks upon His throne
(Aoi! The notion!)
Dance each marrow bone. . . . Thud Thud
Thud Thud
So we pass on, dancing, dancing,
Aoi!
Hand the bucket . . . damn the glass!
Aoi! we're right and tight!
So we pass,
Lords of Darkness in the Everlasting Night.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CAPTAIN GUNBOLT CHARITY AND THE PAINTED LADY

S.S. Boston.
April 2nd. Evening.

I had a splendid offer made me to-day. A man came aboard, with what looked like a drawing-board, wrapped in brown paper.

He had a letter of introduction from a man who knows me.

"My name's Black, as I guess Mr. Abel's told you in the letter," he said. "I want to talk business with you, Cap'n Charity."

"Go ahead!" I said.

"What I say, goes no further, that's understood, I guess?" he asked. "Mr. Abel gave you a good name, Cap'n, an' he told me a thing or two about you that sounded pretty safe to me."

"I'm mum!" I told him. "If you've murdered someone, it's no concern of mine, and I don't want to hear about it. If it's anything clean, get it off your chest. You'll find me a good listener."

He nodded.

"You know about that Mona Lisa bit of goods?" he asked me.

"The picture?" I said.

He nodded again.

Digitized by Google

"Well," he said, "they got the wrong one. That's a copy that's been made from the original. It's a mighty good copy. It should be; it cost me over twenty thousand dollars, before it was finished.

"It's so good, you couldn't make 'em believe it isn't the original. I got the original, though, safe and sound; and a patron of mine's mad for it. That's what I came to see you about. I've got to get it taken across and through the U.S.A. Customs."

"But you don't tell me that a copy could fool all the art experts who've seen the recovered Mona Lisa?" I said. "Why the old canvas——"

"Wood, Cap'n," he interpolated.

"It's on wood, is it?" I said. "I'd never realised that. Well you don't tell me they don't know the kind of wood, and the smell and the general oldness and the seasonedness, and all the rest of it, of a panel of wood as old as that must be. The very smell of it would be enough to tell them whether it was the original or not.

"And that's not all! Why the pigments they used; they can't be matched to-day, so I understand. And how'd you get the 'time tone,' the 'time surface'——? Why, man, any one of these things could never be faked properly—not well enough to deceive an expert who knew his business. And then, I shouldn't think it would be possible for any man alive to even imitate the feeling of the picture—that is, if it's anything like I'm inclined to believe it must be.

"Don't you see, your tale won't wash. All these things put together, make a picture as famous as the Gioconda absolutely un-forgable—that is, of course, to an expert."

Digitized by Google

"Now, Cap'n," he said, "you've had your say, and I'll have mine."

"First of all, to get a panel that could not be pronounced anything but genuine, Cap'n, I had the Mona Lisa panel split, using a special machine-saw for the purpose. It was an anxious job, I can promise you. The man who cut it was an expert at *his* job, and the saw was a specially made ribbon-saw, with hair-fine teeth.

"He practised on a dozen model panels, before I'd let him split the Mona. Then he put the picture flat on the steel saw-table, and he just skinned off the Mona with no more than a sixteenth of an inch of wood under her. He did it as easy and smooth as skimming milk; but I just stood and sweated till it was done.

"He got a hundred dollars for that ten minutes' bit of work, and I guess I got a hundred extra grey hairs.

"Well, Cap'n, then I took the Mona, and mounted her on a brand new panel, for she was on a layer of wood so thin that she bent just with picking her up.

"That's how we got the panel for the copy. The copy's painted on the old Mona Lisa panel. Smart, wasn't it? I guess the Experts couldn't get past that—what! Not much, Sir!

"Queer, when you come to think of it, Cap'n, that if those Frenchmen only thought to notice it (not that they could, after not seeing the lady for a couple of years!) they'd the clue right there, *in the thinner panel,* that the Mona's been doctored!

"Great, I call it! And she'll hang there all through the ages; and people'll come from all parts and stare and gasp and go away, feeling they've seen

Digitized by Google

the only Genuine! And all the time she'll be where all the real stuff's going—in God's own country, Sir—U.S.A. That's her.

"And to think a pair of calipers would give the whole show away, if only they'd taken the thickness of the panel, *before* a 'friend' of mine lifted her out of the Louvre!"

"That was smart, certainly," I said. "You can spin a good cuffer. What about the old pigments and all the rest of the impossible things—eh?"

"The pigments, 'Cap'n, cost me exactly fifteen thousand dollars in cold cash. I bought old canvasses of the same period—some of them were not bad either, and I *scraped* 'em, Sir. Yes I did, for the pigments that were on 'em. Nearly broke my heart! But this is a big business. Then an old painter I know, got the job of his life. He's as clever a man as ever stole a canvas, 'cause he hadn't money to pay for it.

"I got hold of him and locked him up in a room for three months, to get the drink out of him. If someone'd done that for him regular, and given him paint, brushes and canvas, he'd have been pretty near as big a man as the Master himself; but he never could keep his elbow down.

"At the end of the three months, when I'd all my pigments re-ground and mixed ready for use, I showed him the Mona and the empty panel. He went down on to his blessed knees to the thing, and pretty near worshipped.

"I told him there were five thousand big fat dollars for him, the day he'd finished a copy of her, on the wooden panel; that's if the copy were so good, I couldn't tell one from t'other.

Digitized by Google

"Well, Cap'n, he did it. And he did it properly, like a monk might pray. Four months he took; and when it was finished, *I* couldn't have told one painting from the other except that the new one wanted 'sunning'—that's a little secret of my own. I do part of it with a mercury lamp, and part of it with the sun and coloured glass. I gave her a solid year of that treatment, while she was drying and hardening. Then I'd have defied L. da V. himself to tell one from t'other!"

"And the chap who painted the copy?" I asked.

"He got his five thousand bucks," he said, casually. "There's a lot of absinthe in five thousand dollars."

"Poor devil," I said. "What was the idea of getting this copy made for twenty thousand dollars, when you had the real thing?"

"It was for the French Government to sneak," he told me.

"What?" I said.

"It was for a plant!" he explained. "It was going to be 'planted'; and then an agent of mine was going to approach the picture-dealers and offer to sell it, as the real thing, you know.

"And of course, I knew no dealer on the East side the duck-pond would look at it. No use to anyone this side, except to get 'em into bad trouble. I knew the next thing they'd do, would be to lay information, for the sake of the reward and the press notices."

"Well," I asked, "what had you to gain by all that, and what did you gain by getting your agent into the hands of the police?"

"He bungled things!" he told me. "It wasn't my fault he got nabbed. However, he don't matter. He'll

Digitized by Google

be made for life, when he comes out clear of all the bother. I'll see to that; and he knows he can trust me, so long as he holds his tongue."

"But the reason you wanted the authorities to cop the copy you'd spent twenty thousand dollars on?" I asked again. "If you were so anxious for them to have a copy, why didn't you offer to sell it back? They'd have paid a decent sum—quite decent, I should imagine—that's if they couldn't get their hands on you first!"

"That's just the point," he explained. "If I'd offered to sell back the picture, they'd have approached it in a more suspicious spirit; and I want no blessed suspicions at all, Cap'n. If they thought I was trying to get rid of the original, secretly to a dealer, and that they had dropped on me unexpectedly, then their whole frame of mind would be the way I want it to be—see?

"You see, Cap'n, I paid twenty thousand dollars odd to get that copy made, simply for a blind. I'm taking the original out to U.S.A. where I've got a patron for it at five hundred thousand dollars, as I've told you; or anyway as I'm telling you now.

"But he won't even look at it, if there's going to be any bother attached. I've to clean up behind me. I'd to let the French Government have back what they think is their picture; and then my patron can hang the original in his private gallery, without fear of trouble.

"He's a real collector, and it's sufficient for him to know he's got the original, under his own roof-slates, without wanting to shout the song half across the world, like a society hostess.

Digitized by Google

"If there are any comments, he'll acknowledge it to be what it isn't—and that's a *copy*. This is bound to go down, as people are convinced the original is clamped up good and solid, back in its old place in the Louvre. Thank God for that sort of collector, I say. They make living possible for people in my business. Now, have you got all the points, Cap'n?"

He grinned so cheerfully, that I had to do the same thing.

"But all the same," I told him, "I'm not available for handling stolen goods, Mr. Black. You'll have to try further up."

"Come now, Cap'n Charity," he said; "and you a good American, too! I guess we got to have this bit of goods in little old U.S.A. It's too fine for any other nation on earth. You mustn't think it's *only* the dollars I'm thinkin' of. Why, Cap'n, there's a patron of mine, right here in England, that will give me ninety thousand pounds for it, now that I've made it safe; and that's only fifty thousand dollars under what I'm to get across the water. And out of that fifty thousand I've to pay you, and all expenses, *and* run the risk of the U.S.A. Customs dropping on it, and all my work going up in a flare!

"No, Sir! If it were just the dollars only I'm after, I'd sell it right here, within twenty-four hours, and be shut of all trouble and risk; but it's got to go over to our country, Cap'n, and stay right there, till it's acclimatised."

I couldn't help liking the man for that. But I had to stare at him a bit, to size up how much he was honest and how much I was dreaming; but he

Digitized by Google

was honest, right enough; and I felt I'd got to look good and hard; so that I'd not forget what an honest picture-dealer looked like.

"What about the French?" I asked him.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess I'm not French, Cap'n," he said. "Anyway, they've got a fine copy, and you couldn't persuade them, not with a hammer, that it wasn't the real one; not unless you showed 'em the original. I'll agree then they might grow suspicious; but there's not got to be any suspicions set going. That's what all my work's been to stop."

"Look here," I said; "for all I know, this one you want me to put through, may be the *copy*, that you're going to palm off on your customer!"

"No, Sir!" he replied, very wrathy in a moment. "*No*, Sir! I never try that sort of thing. No double-crossing for me! I've never done a patron yet. That's how I've built up my business. I'm known to be honest."

"It's a pity you can't put it through, openly, as the original," I said. "You'd have no duty at all to pay then, seeing that it's more than a hundred years old. Anyway, why don't you put the thing through yourself, as a copy? If your customer's going to manage to palm it off to *his* friends (and there's likely to be some experts among 'em) as a copy, why don't you put it through the Customs, frankly, as a copy? There'll be nothing much to bother about in the duty-line on a mere copy by an unknown artist. Shove a fairly good price on it, so they won't think you're trying to jew them, and there you are. Anyway, Mister, that'll come a heap cheaper than paying

Digitized by Google

me what I should need, before I'd even look at a job of this sort."

He put his finger to the side of his nose, in French fashion.

"Don't you worry, Cap'n," he replied. "That picture's worth five hundred thousand dollars; and I guess I'm taking no chances at all. You must reckon there's others that guess things about this, besides me, and it ain't only the Customs I'm bothering about, but it's a little bunch of crooks that have got to suspecting more than's good for them. And I guess if they can't get a finger in the pie, they're capable of dropping a hint to the New York Customs, just for spite.

"If the Customs put their eyes on the picture, after a hint like that, they'd hold it and communicate with the French authorities, and it'd be all U-P then, once the two pictures were put together and compared.

"And, anyhow, Cap'n, I reckon there may be a bit of trouble, going across; for the gang'll never drop trying, until it's 'no go' for them. They'll sail with the picture and me, on the chance of nipping in before we get to the other side. I'd not be surprised if they came across with a proposal to go shares or split. If they can't do me in any other way.

"Now, what's it to be, Cap'n Charity—are you on, or is it no go?"

I thought for a few seconds, then I answered him:—

"I'll do it," I said. "I guess I'd like it to go across to God's country; and I suppose it's about as much right in the Louvre, as Cleopatra's needle has on

Digitized by Google

the Embankment. Doesn't it belong by rights to Italy?"

He winked at me, and shrugged his shoulders, in a grotesque fashion.

"I guess, Cap'n," he told me, "we won't go into that now, or the Lord knows where the complications are going to end. It's going to belong in little old U.S.A., and that's good enough for me. . . . What'll your figure be, Cap'n?"

"Five per cent.," I told him. "That'll be twenty-five thousand dollars."

"Very good, Cap'n," he agreed. "It's a good tough price; but I'll come across all right. I reckon the more you stand to make out of it, the more like you are to do your best! And just what that is, I guess every Customs official each side of the pond knows! If you do up to your usual, the New York Customs'll never even smell it. That's why I've come to you; and that's why I don't kick at your figure.

"You're a dandy, Cap'n! You're *IT!* I heard about the way you ran that cargo of smokes into Liverpool. That was smart now! That must have taken a bit of planning!"

"Where's the picture?" I asked him.

"Here!" he said, almost in a whisper, and patted the wrapped up drawing-board affair, that he held under his arm.

"Bring it along into my cabin, and let's have a look at it," I told him. "I want to see this *smile* that won't come off, that I've heard so much about. Is it anything wonderful?"

"Cap'n," he said, with extraordinary earnestness, "it *is* wonderful! It's as if one of the old gods had got in some mighty fine work on the panel."

Digitized by Google

We went along to my cabin, and I shut and locked both doors. Then he unwrapped the thing, on the table. It was painted on what appeared to be a solid panel of hard wood, about three quarters of an inch thick. I looked at it for a good bit. It was certainly fine and strange.

"It's got something about it that looks as if a clever devil had painted it," I told him. "She's got no eyebrows. That makes her look a bit peculiar and, somehow, slightly abnormal. But it doesn't explain what I mean. It's as if the elemental female smiled out in her face—not what we mean now-a-days by the word *woman*; but all that is the essential of the *female*, as opposed to the essential of the *male*—not the man, you know! The smile is conscienceless; not consciously so, but naturally. . . . It's as if the unrestrained female—the 'faun' in the woman—the subtle licence in her—the subtle, yet unbridled, *goat*-spirit in her, were spreading out over her face, like a slow stain. It's the truth about that side of a woman that the best part of a man insists on turning his blind eye to. The painting ought to be called:—'The Uncomfortable Truth!'"

"Cap'n," he said, "for a man that pretends not to understand pictures, you're doing mighty well! I guess you've just put into words, a bit that I've felt, but couldn't ever get unmuddled into plain talk. I've felt that, many and many a time, since—well since she came into my hands. It isn't that she's bad, so much as that she's not good! It's as if she's got a throw-back fit on. I guess women get that sometimes—more often than we think!"

"They're primitive things," I said. "Nature keeps them too close to her, to let them be anything else,

Digitized by Google

at bottom. A woman's as primitive as a savage—whether she's cultured or uncultured. Just notice, for instance, her idea of repartee! It is to be crudely insolent in a modulated voice, if she's cultured, and otherwise if she isn't! Her desires are more moderate than a man's, only in those things she *doesn't* want. When she *wants* a thing, she's no more sense of moderation than a child or a savage. Look at her immoderate notions of dressing herself, or undressing herself, perhaps is what I ought to call it! She's no sense of moderation, except about the things she doesn't want! And even then she's immoderate not to want 'em!"

"Cap'n", he said, "you've sure been hit sometime by a woman, and I reck'n she wasn't much good to God or man. I guess I recognise the symptoms!"

I had to laugh at his cuteness; but I didn't add up the particulars for him!

"All the same," I said, nodding at the Mona, "it's a good painting and clever insight; but it's rotten bad art. It's unmoral!"

"Lord, Cap'n Charity, don't talk like that!" he said, genuinely distressed. "I'd begun to think I'd met a man that understood things my way of looking at 'em. An' then you go and blow off like that!"

"Art's not got the right to be a vehicle for unwholesomeness!" I said, smiling a bit at his earnestness.

"I guess, Cap'n, you're wrong, all the way there!" he asserted. "Art's the right to do and say and be what it likes, so long as it's clever and wonderful enough."

Digitized by Google

"No," I said. "Have a cigar. It's not worth talking about, anyway; but you can take it from me that when Art claims only its Privileges, and shirks its complementary Responsibilities, it is bound to become as undesirable as any other irresponsible force."

"I quit, Cap'n!" he said, biting off the end of his cigar. "You out-argue me. The chief thing that counts just now, is there's five hundred thousand dollars on the table there; and twenty-five thousand of them are yours, the day you hand me the painted lady, safe and sound, in Room 86 of the Madison Square Hotel, New York.

"I guess you got that all plain, Cap'n. Meanwhile, I'll book my passage across with you. I reckon I shall feel easier, sleeping in the same ship with her."

"That's all right, Mr. Black," I told him. "If you've got an hour or two to put in, you'll find that chair's comfortable, and that's my brand of whisky in the rack, and there's Perrier and Soda, whichever you fancy."

"Right you are, Cap'n," he said; and while he was making himself comfortable, I began to get out my colours, palette and brushes.

"You paint, Cap'n?" he asked, over the top of his glass. He seemed surprised.

I nodded towards the oils and water-colours, round the bulksheads. He got up with his glass of whisky, and began to go the round, sipping, and muttering some astonishment, as he journeyed.

"My word, Cap'n!" he said at last, facing round at me. "You sure can paint some! And I guess I'm slinging no cheap flattery. What you going to do now?"

Digitized by Google

"I'm going to do an oil sketch of the Mona as a keepsake, right now, and before I hide her for the voyage," I told him. I hauled out a sheet of prepared cardboard from my portfolio. "I guess I'd like to remember I once handled the original," I went on. "And I'd like to have a shot at that smile. The trick of it catches me."

"Good for you, Cap'n," he said, quite interested, and set down his whisky, while he propped up the Gioconda, in a good light from the glazed skylight, above. Then he came round behind me, to watch.

I finished the thing, a rough sketch, of course, in about an hour and a half; and Mr. Black seemed to be genuinely impressed.

"Cap'n," he said, "that's good work, you know! You're a mighty queer sort of sea-captain!"

"Mr. Black," I said, as I fetched out my pipe, "you're a mighty queer sort of picture-dealer!"

But he couldn't see it.

April 8th. At sea.

Mr. Black's an interesting man to talk to; but he's got the itch to know where I've hidden his blessed picture. I've explained to him, though, that when a secret *has* to be kept, it's better kept by one head than by any other number you could think of in a month.

He's had to agree that my method's the right one; but, every time I ask him up to my chart-room for a smoke and a yarn, he has a try to wheedle out of me whereabouts I've stowed away his five hundred thousand dollar lady.

Meanwhile, I've found that he's a good taste for other things besides pictures. As he put it:—

Digitized by Google

"Cap'n, I'm no one-horse show, in the matter of liking good things. A pretty woman I like, and if they're good, so much the better——"

"They're rare!" I told him.

"I grant you that, Cap'n," he said. "As rare as a high-pressure man with a sound temper. That's why they're some worth finding. Well, I like a pretty woman, a good violin solo, a good whisky, a good picture, and a good patron of art. And I reckon the five mean life!"

I smiled, and I said nothing; but when he came up to my chart-room to-day, I introduced him to a pretty young American, of the name of Lanny, who has made a point of pall-ing on with me, and has come up to look at my pictures.

When he came in, she was criticising my copy of the Gioconda, on cardboard, which I had pinned up on the bulkshead; and after I had introduced him, she hauled him into the discussion, willy-nilly.

"I think that's a fine piece of work of the Captain's," she said. "But you sure ought to see the original in the Louvre, Mr. Black. Captain Charity's done fine; but the original just gives you shivers all down your spine."

"I've seen it, Miss Lanny," he assured her, "and I agree with you. It's a mighty wonderful thing. But Cap'n Charity don't reckon it's good art!"

"What!" said Miss Lanny. "Captain Charity, you don't tell me that?"

"It's not good art, Miss Lanny," I said. "It's true; but it shows the ugly side of a woman's character."

"That's downright insulting, Captain," she said, warmly. "I reckon it shows what the great artist

Digitized by Google

meant it to show. It shows the delicate subtlety and refined spirituality of woman. There's more in La Gioconda's smile than in the laughter of a hundred men."

"I hope you're right, Miss Lanny," I said. "For the sake of the hundred men. In fact, I'm sure you are right, supposing that the hundred men are good average, clean, wholesome citizens."

This talk occurred this morning; and I put the stopper on then, for it was getting a bit too serious. I felt if the young lady came out with any more of that cheap suffragette I'm-better-'n-any-man-that-steps-the-earth kind of thing, I should begin to feel like the giant, when the boy slapped him with his own hair-brushes. And when I get feeling like that, I never know whether I'm going to turn rude or over polite; and either way is not the method, when there's a pretty girl in one's chart-room, who looks as if she's good as gold and chock full of hell-fire, all in one and the same moment.

But they seldom are either, let alone both; not when it comes to the pinch. They so often talk big, and then fizzle out into silly viciousness, or else you find the gold's only gilding on top of a deal of petty thoughts on things in general and men in particular! Lord! doesn't that sound narky!

April 10*th*. *Night*. *Late*.

Great excitement. At least, Mr. Black's in a state.

He's spent most of the last two days spooning Miss Lanny, in *my* chart-house, while I've made shots at doing sky effects in water-colours.

I call that cool, to try to cut me out with the young

Digitized by Google

lady; though I can't say that she's seemed backwards! But I've had my revenge! I've made a set of six caricatures of the two of 'em looking generally spoony and absolutely loony!

However, this sort of thing has to be paid for!

About an hour ago, Mr. Black sent word by a steward, would I come along to his cabin. Lord! The mess! Someone, or several, I should think, had been through his place, and left it like a wooden township after a cyclone.

His box lids had all been ripped off; his bed had been pulled to pieces, and his mattress had been cut open; his wardrobe (he's got a suite de luxe, off the saloons) was ripped away from the bulkshead, and was lying on its side, and the mirror had been broken clean out and lay on the carpet.

The marble top had been lifted off the wash-stand, and the carpet had been pulled up in several places and was ripped across, as if with a pair of shears.

In his dining room, the Louis sixteenth sofa had met bad trouble, and yielded up its springs, much tapestry and the ghost, all at once. The writing table had its top lifted off, and another table had evidently seen trouble. The heavy pile carpet here was divorced both from itself and the floor, and lay in heaps, literally cut to pieces.

In the bathroom, some of the tiles had been forced out, as if the human cyclone had meant to make sure of what lay below; and in the dressing-room, things had equally not been neglected.

I sat down on the wreckage of Mr. Black's bed, and roared. He just stood and stared.

Digitized by Google

"You sure see the funny side of a thing, Cap'n!" he said at last.

"This'll pay you for cutting me out with my lady friends!" I told him, when I could breathe again. "I suppose you been up, spooning on the boat-deck, instead of coming down and turning-in at a reasonable hour, like a Christian."

He looked sheepish enough to please me.

"Providence, Mr. Black," I told him, "is always careful to leave the dustpan on the stairs, when it sees we're getting too 'aughty." Then I got serious. "Missed anything?" I asked him.

"Not a thing yet," he said; "but it'll take a bit of straightening out."

I rang for his servant, and sent a message to the chief steward.

Fortunately the next suite was empty, and we moved Mr. Black's gear into it. Just the three of us; for I want no talk among the passengers until the trip is finished. That sort of thing is better kept quiet.

The chief steward locked up the whole suite, and we knew then there could be no talk; for Black's servant had not been allowed in to see the place, since the trouble.

"Now, Mr. Black," I said, "come along up to my place for a talk."

When we reached my cabin, Mr. Black had a whisky to pick him up; and we talked the thing over; though I saw he didn't see as far into it as I had done already.

"Anyway," I told him, "you've lost nothing; and now they'll leave you alone. They've proved the

Digitized by Google

thing isn't in your possession. If it had been, they'd sure have had it—eh?"

"Sure!" he said, soberly. "Are you mighty certain it's safe where you've put it?"

"Safe till the old ship falls to pieces!" I told him. "All the same, they must be a pretty determined lot, whoever they are; and I expect they'll be paying my quarters a visit if they get the half of a show. By the Lord! I'd like 'em to try it on!"

April 11th. Afternoon.

Mr. Black and Miss Lanny spent the morning up with me in my chart-room. The talk turned on a water-colour I was making of the distant wind-on-spray effects, and I hit out once or twice at Miss Lanny's critical remarks.

"That's pretty good, Cap'n Charity," she said, looking over my shoulder; "but I like your copy of the Gioconda better; though you haven't got the da Vinci ability to peep underneath, and see the abysmal deeps of human nature."

"Dear lady," I said, "may I light a cigarette in your presence, and likewise offer you one?"

She accepted, and Mr. Black also.

"Da Vinci was a great painter!" I said.

"I'm sure," she answered.

"But he wasn't a great artist. . . . Understand, I'm judging him just on the Mona, which is the only thing of his I've seen; but which is supposed to be his greatest work."

"That's a wicked thing to say, Cap'n!" she interrupted. "The whole world acclaims him great!"

"He's one more proof," I said, "of the truth of my

Digitized by Google

contention that a man may be a 'great painter' or a 'great sculptor' without being a great artist; in other words a man of great feeling, and intellectuality combined—that is to say, a Compleat Personality.

"I admit that a great artist does occasionally happen to be a 'great painter' or a 'great sculptor'; and as a result his sculpture or painting, as the case may be, is vastly more *complete*, perfect, great, (call it which you like) than the work of the other sort; but, so far, the 'other sort' seems able to dispense with the greatness of personality, which is the 'bricks' of the great artist. . . . This quality doesn't appear to be necessary to their 'greatness,' any more than greatness of Personality is necessary to the making of a great singer. A great singer may be (and sometimes is) a human pig, into whose larynx has been inserted the throstle of an angel; but he's still what he'd be if you took the tune-pipe out of his throat—and that's plain unadulterated, unintellectual, unfeeling p-i-g. I don't mean to say they're *unemotional*. They're generally emotional enough, the Lord knows! So's a congenital idiot, a drunken man, a woman of easy virtue, or a certain type of actor when he's just been told he's outtopped old Garrick!"

She was gasping now in her attempts for words suitable to my eternal quenching. She got some of them out; but they cut no ice! Finally, she demanded fiercely, in so many words:—

"What do you mean?"

That was a plain question; and I answered it plainly:—

"The da Vinci johnny was too busy looking out for his abysmal *deeps* of human nature, to remember

Digitized by Google

the heights!" I told her. "He was like a painter, with his eye glued into a sewer, painting and sweating himself into eternal fame—that is in the eyes of other Perverts like himself; and in the eyes of the big blind, indiscriminative, unmeaning crowd that follows the shouting of the Perverts, because they don't know enough to shout tosh frankly.

"Now, the value of the Mona must be put at a high figure, maybe ten million dollars in the *open* market." (I grinned cheerfully at the back of my mind.) "But if it's worth that, it's worth it as a painting—not as a *compleat* work of art!"

"You're mad, Cap'n; either mad or ignorant, or both!" she slammed out at me, and I could see that Mr. Black wanted to say much the same thing.

"St. Paul is my brother, dear lady," I said; "only he was accused of achieving his through much learning!

"Meanwhile, I assert that our friend da Vinci was not a great artist—not if you judge him on the merits of the Mona as a compleat work of art. (Fine word compleat. Means *just* what I want it to mean!)"

"Why? Why? Why?" she broke out again, reduced once more to blank questioning.

"Yes," joined in Mr. Black, beginning to show warmth, "I'd just like to know, Cap'n, how you make out da Vinci's not a great or compleat, or whatever you like to call it, artist?"

"Because," I said, "Art is personality expressed in and through the 'artist's' subject. If the artist's personality is a great personality and a balanced one, it will express itself in and through his subject in a great and balanced way. And the greater and more

Digitized by Google

balanced the personality, the more the artist's work will approximate to perfect art—Great Art; always supposing that the man is a master craftsman, which, of course, is understood.

"The Great Art is the great, wise, compleat human personality, vital and therefore creative, expressing itself through some medium; inevitably a 'handicraft.' I'm using the word widely.

"If, however, the artist has a twisted personality, the twist will express itself in and through his work, and the work will be as much out of perspective in its deviation from compleat sanity and truth, as it would be technically, were the artist an indifferent craftsman.

"You see, sound art is a true, *personal* expression of anything, in its general relationship to human nature. If a man's art produces results which are not coupled up with human nature, it becomes non-intelligible to the human; as much so, as are the X rays to the human retina!

"And it is because of all these things that I condemn the Mona as a work of the highest art. It is the product of a twisted art and a very great handicraft."

"It is a perfect work of great and wondrous art!" said Miss Lanny. "I like to see how piffly little amateurs, try to teach the Master!"

I laughed at her bad temper.

"Dear lady," I said, "you admit my copy of the Gioconda is not so bad," and I beckoned to where I had pinned the picture on the bulkshead, under the skylight.

"By the side of the original," she smiled at me, "it is as a ginger-pop bottle beside a Venetian glass

Digitized by Google

wonder. You sure got a healthy conceit of yourself, Cap'n!"

"Mea culpa, dear lady!" I murmured, holding out my case of gold-tips. "I suppose you'll deny next the truth of my contention that all art must say something, or it's nothing?"

"Art needn't say a thing, and you know it, Cap'n!" she said.

"Just so," agreed Mr. Black. "It's sufficient to be just what it is! A picture isn't meant to be a book!"

"Quite so!" I told him. "It takes a certain amount of brains and mental energy, that is, personality, to write even a moderately good book! And a book is great or not, in so far as it says much or little, and says it truly or askewly, completely or incompletely. And that simple little test is the test for all art—painting, sculpture, prose, poetry, music—all of it; for if a 'work of art' says nothing, it is nothing.

"The matter with the Mona is that it says only part of what it should say; and the part that it does say is no more a compleat measure of a woman, than a pint-measure approximates to a furlong, in any sense. He has seen only the female in the woman, and painted it in the 'moment of gratification.' It no more approximates to a normal or compleat human woman, than a male, portrayed in a moment of murderous fight, approximates to a normal or compleat human man. It is simply an abnormality—showing nothing beyond what is painted! As abnormal as if the artist had drawn, shall we say, one enlarged nostril of an ape-man, and handed that down to posterity as a compleat work of art. But it is wonderful handicraft; and does not forget the shaven eyebrows——"

Digitized by Google

"Why, Cap'n, you've painted your copy with eyebrows!" interrupted Miss Lanny.

"Yes," I said. "I like the effect better. I've no use for those abnormal effects. Besides, it's more decent!"

"Lord!" muttered Mr. Black, "you sure are cracked to-day, Cap'n."

"The Mona," I asserted once more, "is a twisted fragment of a woman—the produce of a twisted nature. As opposed to this inadequacy, the Greatest Art is complete, in the sense that it shows a Man or a Woman or a Moment in such a way that you see, *with* the great and particular insight of the artist who created the work, the thing you are shown, *plus* all the rest, which it makes or aids you to comprehend also. It portrays the Man, the Woman, or the Moment, in such a way that you realise, as you look, all the potentialities of the Man, the Woman, the Moment—The greatness and absurd weakness of the Man; the infinite tenderness and incredible meanness of the Woman; and the æons of Eternity that lie in wait behind the Moment.

"The Gioconda is, as I've said, a small Art and a very great Handicraft; that is, if it is anything at all! It's abnormal—a fine handicraft and a cute brain used to give out to the world the twisted freakishness of the biassed soul, that could not see the woman as a complete whole! I understand, I guess, because I'm a bit twisted myself; it's only in odd moments that I can fight down the twist in me, which makes me see every woman worse even than she is.

"There, you see! I can't stop slamming at 'em; not even when I'm out to explain!"

Digitized by Google

I had to laugh at myself; and the tension eased out of the two of them. I had watched the softer look of capable feminine interest, supersede the incapable critical light in Miss Lanny's eyes, as I had explained my own short-comings.

"Cap'n Charity's sure running amock, every time a woman's on the carpet!" said Mr. Black. "I guess, Miss Lanny, he's like a number of men, he's gone and got fond of a bad 'un, some time or other, and she's scorched the youngness out of his soul. I know!"

He wagged his head at me.

"The only reason he'll talk about the Mona, is because she's a woman, bless her," he said. "But, you know, Cap'n, you'll sure have to quit going on the rampage like that, or it'll be getting a habit. I once got a bit like that myself, and I guess I know! It was some fight I had to break from it."

Miss Lanny reached out her hand for another cigarette, and then bent towards me, for a light.

"Was she a very bad woman, Captain Charity?" she said, under her breath. "She must have been!" She looked up into my eyes, through the smoke of her cigarette. "I'm sorry you've had that sort of experience of women," she went on, still in an undertone, and still looking up into my eyes. "You ought sure to know a really nice woman; she would heal you up."

"Why?" I asked. And then:—"Do you reckon you're qualified to act the part of kind healer, dear lady?"

"I'd not mind trying," she said, still in a low tone.

"Why," I said, out loud, so that Mr. Black could

Digitized by Google

hear, where he sat, over by the open doorway, "in your way, you're just as bad! You say a thing like that, in a tone to make me think you're a stainless Angel of Pity and Compassionate Womanhood; and at bottom you're just another of them! You may be virtuous, I don't say you aren't. I believe you are; but you're up to all the eternal meanness and everlasting deceit of the woman! You come here, posing as my friend; as the friend of Mr. Black, chummy and friendly with us, even to the point of losing your temper; and all the time you're one of a gang of thieves aboard this ship, trying to diddle Mr. Black or me out of a picture you and your pals think is aboard!"

As I spoke, she had whitened slowly, until I thought she must surely faint. And she sat there, without saying a word, the smoke curling up from her cigarette, between her finger-tips, and her eyes looking at me dumbly, and big and dark through the thin smoke.

Mr. Black had stood up, and taken a quick step towards me, an incredulous anger in his face, as I had proceeded to formulate my charge against Miss Lanny; but he had checked, at my mention of the picture, and now he was staring in a stunned sort of way at the girl. We were both looking at her; but she never moved, and she never ceased to look at me in that speechless fashion.

"You allowed Mr. Black to make love to you last night, late, so that you could keep him up on the boat-deck, while your friends ransacked his suite And now, as you realise that Mr. Black has not got the picture, you and your friends suppose that I must have it; and you have been directed to divert

Digitized by Google

your valuable attentions to me. . . . If necessary, I don't doubt that you meant to encourage a little love-making on my part, up on the boat-deck or elsewhere to-night, while an attempt was made on my cabin.

"But I assure you, dear Madam, that, where a lady is concerned, it has been my rule in life to avoid making one of a crowd. Also, as Captain of this vessel, I have facilities for keeping an eye on things which might surprise you and your friends.

"In proof of this, let me mention the names of your gang. . . . They are Messrs. Tillosson, Vrager, Bentley and finally Mr. Alross, your husband.

"I had the names of three of them before we had been at sea twenty-four hours; and now I think I may say I can put my finger on the whole lot of you.

"It is quite within my power to cause the arrest of you and your party; but there is no need.

"Neither Mr. Black nor I have any fear of what your friends can do; for let me tell you, the only Mona Lisa on view aboard this ship, is the copy which you see hanging up there on the bulkshead.

"Surely you did not suppose that if Mr. Black has or had a valuable picture to transmit to New York, he would advertise the fact to people of your sort, by travelling in the same vessel with it!

"That is almost all I have to say. You had better go now. Provided I receive from your party before to-night, the sum of one hundred and two pounds, fifteen shillings (which is the chief steward's estimate of the damage done to Mr. Black's suite last night), I shall allow affairs to pass; and your party may land free in New York.

Digitized by Google

"But, if the money is not delivered before six o'clock to-night, and if afterwards I have any further trouble with Messrs. Tillosson, Vrager, Bentley, Alross or yourself, I shall order the arrest of the entire party, and shall hand you all over to the police, when we enter New York."

She had spoken not a single word; only once had she shown any sign of feeling, and that was when I announced my knowledge of her relationship to Mr. Alross, a tall, thin, blond man, of quiet manners and an unhappy skill at cards. Then the hand which held the cigarette had begun to shake a little; but, beyond this, never a sign of the shock, except the absolutely ghastly whiteness of her face. She certainly is a woman of nerve, and a good pluck too, I grant her.

Then she stood up suddenly, and what do you think she said?

"Cap'n, your cigarettes are as treacherous as you seem to imagine all women to be. See how it's burnt me, while I was listening to your scolding. . . . I must run away now."

And she turned and walked out of the chart-house, as calmly as if she had just been in for one of her usual chats.

"How's that for 'some'!" I said to Mr. Black. "Let me tell you, man, I respect her courage. She's got the real *female* brand of pluck, and full strength at that. She's stunned half dead at the present moment, yet she carried it off! But, Lord! She's a conscienceless creature."

Mr. Black was all questions; and he wanted to know why I'd tried to make them think the picture wasn't aboard.

Digitized by Google

"I told them what I told 'em," I said, "in the gentle hope that they may try to believe it, and so not consider it worth while to lay information with the Customs, which is a thing they'd do in a moment, as you mentioned, just to make things ugly for us, and to ease their own petty spite.

"Why not arrest them?" he asked.

"Don't want any unnecessary Mona Lisa talk in New York, do you?"

"My hat! No!" he said.

"And now they know I'm on to the crowd of them, they're bound to walk a bit like Agag—eh?" I said. "No, I guess we'll have no more trouble with 'em, this side of New York. And I bet they pay up within the hour."

April 12th. Night.

I was wrong in one respect, and right in the other. The money was sent up to me by a steward, inside of half an hour; and I sent back a formal receipt.

But we have not seen the end of our troubles about the picture; for the gang approached Mr. Black quite openly, last night, and told him that if he'd let them come in on a quarter-share of the profits, they'd hold their tongues, and give him all the assistance they could. If he said no; then the New York Customs were going to get the tip, as soon as ever the search officers came aboard.

They told him quite plainly that they knew the picture was aboard; and that they were satisfied *I* was the one who had it hidden away. But, as they put it to him, it was one thing to hide contraband jewels, like small packets of pearls, of which a hun-

Digitized by Google

dred thousand dollars worth could go into one cigar; but that I could never hope to hide from the Customs, if they were put on the scent, a thing the size of the Mona, which being painted on a panel of wood, could not be rolled up small, like a picture on canvas, etc., etc.

They quite worked on poor old Mr. Black's feelings. I guess he may be some expert at picture stealing, like any other dealer; but he's out of it when it comes to real nerve—the kind that's wanted for running stuff through the Customs!

However, I've got him pacified; and I guess he'll manage now to keep a stiff upper lip. I pointed out to him that a twenty-thousand-ton ship is a biggish affair, and there are quite some hiding places aboard of her; and that I know them all.

I told him, in good plain American, that the picture would not be found.

"You needn't fear they'll start to break the ship up, looking for it!" I told him. "Ship-breaking is an expensive job. Don't you get fretful. They'll never find her, where I've put her!"

April 13th. Evening.

We docked this morning, and the gang did their best to do us down.

I reckon they'd guessed I wasn't keen to arrest them; and they just put the Customs wise to the whole business, before they went ashore, that is, as far as they had it sized up.

Well, next thing I knew, the chief searcher was in my place, demanding Mona Lisas, as if they were stock articles; but I disabused him, to the best of my ability.

Digitized by Google

"No, Sir!" I told him. "The only Mona Lisa picture we've got on exhibition in this gallery, is the one there on the bulkshead; and I guess you can have that for fifty dollars, right now, and take it home. I reckon that's a good painting now, don't you, Mister, for an amateur?"

But I couldn't enthuse him; not up to a sale! He was out for big things it seemed, by his talk; so I let him search. . . .

They're still at it, and Mr. Black, last I saw of him, as he went ashore, was looking about as anxious as a man who's bet someone else's last dollar on a horse race!

April 14th.

Still searching.

April 15th.

Still searching.

April 16th. Afternoon.

Mr. Black sent a messenger down aboard this morning, to ask when 'it' was going to come.

I swore; for if that note had got into the wrong hands, the game would have been all up. I've warned him to keep away from the ship, and not to communicate with me, in any way. I'll act as soon as it's safe.

I decided to give him a heart-flutter, as a lesson to be patient.

"Look here," I said to the hotel messenger; and I pulled down the cardboard on which was my painted version of the Mona. I rolled it up and handed it across to him. "Take this ashore," I told him. "Go to a picture dealer's, and tell them to frame

Digitized by Google

it in a cheap frame, and send it up to A. Black, Esq., Room 86, Madison Square Hotel, with the compliments of Captain Charity. Tell them to wrap it up well; as if it were something valuable. Here's a dollar for you, my son. Tell them he'll pay! When you see Mr. Black, tell him that '*it*'—mind you say '*it*'—is coming! . . . It is! . . . When I say so! And not before!"

When he had gone, I sat down and roared at poor Black's digestion, when he found what 'it' amounted to. I guess I'll not be bothered with him now, until I'm ready to see him.

April 16th. Night.

I went ashore to see Mr. Black this evening. The Customs nabbed me *en route*, as usual, and I had a search that would have unmasked a blushing postage stamp. But they needn't fear. I'm not carting Mona Lisas ashore in the thick of this hue and cry!

When I saw Mr. Black, it was for the first time since he left the ship, and he rushed at me.

"Where is it?" he asked. He looked positively ill.

"Dear man," I said, "I don't hawk the Mona around with me. Perhaps that's what you want," and I pointed to the caricature of the Mona, in its cheap frame, which stood on the top of a book-case.

"Quit it!" he snapped, almost ugly; but I only laughed at him.

Then I took out my hanky, and a bottle of solution. I lifted the picture down and put it on the table; I wet my hanky with the solution, and wiped the picture over gently but firmly.

The eyebrows came away; also one or two other parts where I had laid my fake paint on pretty thick.

Digitized by Google

"There's the Mona, Mr. Black," I said; "and I guess you owe me twenty-five thousand dollars."

He looked; then he yelled; yes, he fairly yelled; first his delight, then his questions. I endured the first, and answered the second.

"You saw me paint a picture, didn't you?" I asked.

"Sure!" he said.

"Well, I did that, as I told you, for a *keepsake,*" I said. "Afterwards, I took the Mona, soaked her off the board-backing you had glued her to, and re-mounted her on cardboard. Then I painted her a pair of eyebrows with fake paint, and touched up one or two other parts of the picture; and you and Miss Lanny spent most of the voyage criticising the immortal da Vinci. You see, I hung my own copy on the bulkshead first; but afterwards replaced it with the Gioconda.

"Miss Lanny called her even worse things than I did. She told me, if I remember right, that the painting was like a ginger-pop bottle compared with Venetian glass!

"I think I said he was not a big artist; and as for you, you looked as if you backed up what Miss Lanny said. Altogether, poor old da Vinci had a lot of hard things said against him. And all the time, his masterpiece, plus a pair of eyebrows, and some surface polish, was looking down at us from the bulkshead. I offered her to the Customs officer for fifty dollars; but I couldn't get him to bid.

"Yes, Mr. Black, I've enjoyed myself this trip. That's what I call doing the thing in style.

"Thanks, yes, twenty-five thousand dollars is the figure. I guess we've got to celebrate this!"

Digitized by Google

CAPTAIN JAT

(An Account of Certain Adventures.)

THE ISLAND OF THE UD

Pibby Tawles, cabin-boy and deck-hand, stood to leeward of the half-poop, and stared silently at the island, incredibly lonely against the translucence of the early dawn—a place of lonesome and mysterious silence, with strange birds of the sea wheeling and crying over it, and making the silence but the more apparent.

Away to wind'ard, Captain Jat, his Master, stood stiff and erect against the growing light, all his leathery length of six feet, five inches, set into a kind of grim attention as he stared at that black shadow upon the sea, that lay off his weather bow.

The minutes passed slowly, and the dawn seemed to dream, stirred to reality only by the far and chill sound of the birds crying so dreely. The small barque crept on, gathering the slight morning airs to her aid, whilst the dawn-shine grew subtly and strengthened up, so that the island darkened the more against it for a little while, and grew stealthily more real. And all the time, above it, the sea birds swung about in noiseless circling against the gold-of-light that hung now in all the lower sky.

Digitized by Google

Presently, there came the hoarse hail of the look-out man, who must have waked suddenly :—

"Land on the weather bow, Sir!"

But the lean, grim-looking figure to wind'ard vouchsafed no reply, beyond a low-growled "grrrrr!" of contempt.

And all the time, Pibby Tawles, the boy, stared, overwhelmed with strange imaginings—treasure, monsters, lovely women, weirdness unutterable, terror brooding beyond all powers of his imagination to comprehend! He had listened to some marvellously strange things, when Captain Jat had been in drink; for it was often then the Captain's whim to make the boy sit at table with him, and dip his cup likewise in the toddy-bowl.

And presently, when Captain Jat had drunk his toddy steadily out of a big pewter mug, he would begin to talk; rambling on in garrulous fashion from tale to tale; and, at last, as like as not, mixing them quite inextricably. And as he talked, the long, lean man would throw his glance back over his shoulder suspiciously every minute or so, and perhaps bid the boy go up on to the little half-poop, and discover the whereabouts of the officer of the watch, and then into the cabin of the officer whose watch it might chance to be below, and so to make sure that neither of his Mates were attending listening ears on the sly.

"Don't never tell the Mates, boy!" he would say to Pibby Tawles, "or I'll sure maul you! They'd be wantin' profits."

For that was, in the main, the substance of all his talks—treasure, that is to say. To be exact, treasure and women.

Digitized by Google

"Never a word, boy. I trusts you; but not no one else in this packet."

And, truly, Captain Jat did seem to have a trust in the boy; for, in his cups, he told him everything that came up in his fuddled mind; and always the boy would listen with a vast interest, putting in an odd question this time and that to keep the talk running. And, indeed, it suited him very well; for though he could never tell how much to believe, or how little, he was very well pleased to be sitting drinking his one cup of toddy slowly in the cabin, instead of being out on deck, doing ship-work.

It is true that the Captain appeared both to like the boy in his own queer fashion and to trust him; but, for all that, he had with perfect calmness and remorseless intent, shown him the knife with which he would cut his throat, if ever he told a word of anything that his Master might say to him during his drinking bouts.

Captain Jat's treatment of the lad was curious in many ways. He had him to sleep in a little cabin abaft the Mate's, where, through the open door, he could see the boy in his bunk. When he ran out of toddy, he would heave his pewter mug at the lad's head, as he lay asleep, and roar to him to turn-out and brew him fresh and stronger; but this trick of the Captain's was no trouble to Pibby; for he rigged a dummy oakum-head to that end of his bunk which showed through the open door-way, and slept then the other way about.

And so, with this little that I have told, you may know something of the life aft in the cabin of the little barque *Gallat*, which vessel belonged, stick-and-keel,

Digitized by Google

to Captain Jat; and some pretty rum doings there were aboard of her, first and last, as you may now have chance to judge.

At times, another side of Captain Jat would break out, and he would spend the whole of a watch, having a gorgeous pistol-shooting match against Pibby; and a wonderfully good shot the boy was, both by natural eye, and by the training he had this way. In the end, the boy became a better shot than Captain Jat himself, who was an extraordinarily fine marksman; though somewhat unequal. Yet, for all that Pibby beat him time after time, this peculiar man showed no annoyance; but persisted in the matches, as if his primary intention were to make the boy an expert with the weapon; and, indeed, I have little doubt but that this was his real desire.

Now, although Pibby Tawles had tremendously confused and vague ideas as to what strangeness or mystery was concerned with the island, yet he knew perfectly that it was no chance that had brought them that way; for all the Captain's talks over his toddy had gone to show that the *true* aim of the voyage was to bring-up near the island for some purpose that the lad could only guess at in a mystified way, owing to the muddling fashion in which Captain Jat had run his yarns one into another, treasure, women, monsters, and odd times a queer habit of muttering to himself about his little priestess—his little priestess! And once he had broken out into a kind of hazy ramble about the Ud, rolling his eyes at the boy strangely, and gesticulating so impressively with his pewter mug that he had managed to spread

Digitized by Google

his toddy in an unprejudiced manner over Pibby, the table and the floor generally.

Therefore, having, as I have said, a sure knowledge that the island they approached was the real goal of the voyage, though there was an honest enough cargo below hatches, you may imagine something of Pibby's blank astonishment when Captain Jat allowed the barque to sail quietly past, touching neither brace, sheet nor tack; so that, by the morning was full come, the island lay upon the weather quarter, and presently far away astern.

Yet, as they had gone past, the lad had studied it very eagerly, and had seen in the light of the coming day that it was wooded almost everywhere, even close down to the shores, with a long, bold reef of stark rock running out in a great sweep upon the South side, so that it was plain a boat could be landed there very safely and easily under its lee. The island, Pibby had noticed, rose towards the centre, into a low, seeming flat-topped hill, with the forests of great trees very heavy on its slopes.

All the morning the *Gallat* stood to the Southward, until they had sunk the island below the horizon. They hove-to then, and drifted until near evening, when they filled once more on her, and stood back to the Northward. By four bells that night they sighted the island, looking like a doleful smudge in the darkness away to the North-east.

Presently, the barque was put in irons, and orders given to lower the dingy. When she was in the water, Captain Jat flipped Pibby on the ear, and growled to him to jump down into the boat. The boy climbed over, and Captain Jat followed, after having first

Digitized by Google

directed the Second Mate, whose watch it was, to reach out into the open, and run in again about midnight.

The Captain took the after oar, and rowed standing up, with his face to the bows, whilst Pibby, the boy, took the bow-oar and rowed sitting down.

"Easy with that oar, boy!" said Captain Jat presently, after he had pulled awhile. "Put your shirt round it." And this, Pibby had to do, and row naked to the waist, whilst his shirt muffled the sound of his oar between the thole-pins. But, after all, the night was pretty warm.

Meanwhile, the Captain had pulled off his own coat and ripped out one of the sleeves, which he reeved on to his oar, and so made it as silent as the lad's. And this way, almost as quietly as a shadow boat in the darkness, they came in presently under the shelter of the great barrier reef, and very soon then to the uncomfortable silence of the shore under the dark trees that came down so near to the sea.

Here, before Captain Jat landed, he bid the boy lay on his oar, whilst he listened. But they could hear nothing, except the far, dull booming of the sea upon the exposed beach beyond the great reef—the solemn noise of the sea coming very hushed and distant to them, and blending with the dree little sounds that came out of the near forest, as the night airs went wandering on into its gloom.

"Keep her afloat till I come, boy," said Captain Jat, as he stepped ashore. He walked a few paces up the beach, settling a brace of great double-barrelled pistols in his belt. Then he turned sharply and came back:—

Digitized by Google

"Not a sound, boy, or you're as good as dead," he said grimly, in a low tone. "Not a sound, so what you hears! Keep off there in the shadow of the reef. You'll hear me squark like a catched molley-hawk, when I come. Keep your eyes wide open, boy!" And with that, he slewed round on his heel, and went up pretty quick across the sand into the darkness of the black trees.

Pibby Tawles, the boy, stood in the bows of the boat, and stared after him, listening to the vague sounds of his passage growing ever distant and more distant, but odd-whiles sounding out clear through the dark forests, as some dried kippin snapped under his weight. Then, as Captain Jat went farther and farther, the silence of the island fell again about Pibby, save for the odd whispering of the leaves in the little airs that came off the sea, and the constant solemn booming of the ocean on the far beach that lay exposed upon the outward arc of the great reef.

And so, listening there, and full of the mystery of all the vague and muddled tales that Captain Jat had maundered through so often, over the toddy, is it any matter for surprise that the lad, Pibby, grew suddenly frightened of the loneliness and the silence, and began to think there were pale ovals, among the dark tree-trunks, that peered at him?

He thrust his hand down, inside of his trousers, and eased a small double-barrelled pistol out of a canvas pocket he had stitched in there with a palm and needle, and sail-twine for thread. The feel of the small weapon gave him a degree of comfort, and abruptly he remembered that Captain Jat had told him to keep

Digitized by Google

the boat off in the shadow of the reef. He jumped out over the bows, holding the pistol in his right hand, and found to his dismay that the boat was aground. He put his bare shoulder to her stem, and hove madly awhile, sweating; for he felt that Captain Jat was quite capable of knifing him on his return, if he found the boat hard ashore. With a determination, vague but dogged, to protect himself with his pistol if necessary, he made one vast, final effort, and the boat slid afloat.

He jumped in over the bows, ran aft and put his pistol on the stern thwart; then with the boat-hook he pushed out, and so came in a minute under the gloom of the reef, which rose up just there into a chaos of great rocks, weed-hidden at their bases. He thrust the boat-hook into a mass of weed, and anchored the boat temporarily.

Then, with a sudden shiver, he remembered his shirt, and, having freed it, he covered his damp back.

Pibby Tawles had been sitting quietly in the boat for, maybe, half an hour, when he heard something that made him lean forward on the thwart and listen tensely. There was something moving, in among the great rocks and boulders where the reef thrust into the shore; and the sounds were exceedingly curious:—Slither! slither! click-click, and then a loud squelch and a great splashing, as if some huge thing scrambling over the rocks, had slipped and fallen into one of the pools left by the sea.

There was a little time of silence, and then again came the sharp, click, click, followed by a loud grating noise over the rocks. The noise frightened the boy extraordinarily, and he freed the boat-hook

Digitized by Google

silently from the weed, and began nervously to punt the boat out farther from the shore; but keeping very carefully in the gloom that the shadow of the reef cast.

He held the boat again, some dozen fathoms farther out, and waited. He could hear the strange noises continuing, oddly broken by pauses of profound quiet; then again the slithering and clicking sounds. Abruptly, there was a loud crash—a huge boulder had been moved bodily and sent rolling down from the higher parts of the reef on to the shore. The boulder was a big one; for Pibby could see it vaguely through the darkness, where it had bounded out into the soft sand. He thought vividly and horridly of Captain Jat's muddled yarns of grim things, and he began again silently to push the boat farther out.

Even as he loosed the hook of the boat-hook out from the weed, there came a tremendous scrambling noise among the rocks in-shore, and something moved out silently on to the vague white sand of the beach. It passed over a darker patch, of pebbles, and the lad heard the rounded stones grinding against each other, as if under a vast weight. The pistol seemed only a foolish toy in his hand, and he got down suddenly on to the bottom-boards of the boat and lay flat.

A long while seemed to pass, during which he heard further sounds that told him the thing was moving along the beach. He kept very still, and presently there was only the silence of the quiet sea and the island about him again, with the seas booming far and hollowly on the unprotected shore beyond the reef, and the faint stirrings of the forest trees

Digitized by Google

whispering oddly to him across the quiet strip of sea that held the boat off the sand.

He sat up, cautiously, and found that the boat still rose and fell on the gentle heaves of the sea close in under the gloom of the reef. He took the boat-hook and anchored her again, and all the time his gaze searched the vague shore; but he saw nothing and heard nothing, and gradually he grew easier.

A long time passed, whilst he sat, pistol in hand, watching and listening. Everything remained quiet, and slowly he began to nod, drowsing and waking through the minutes, so that he could not be said to be either awake or asleep. And then, in a moment, he was wide awake, for there was a sound breaking the utter stillness. He sat up, gripping his pistol, and staring nervously; and as he stared, the sound came again, a far, faint, inhuman howling away up through the dark forests to the North of him. He stood up in the boat, and, abruptly, a great way off in the night, there came the sound of a shot, and once more the howling, only that now there was a strange screaming as well. There was another shot, and one single, shrill scream that came to him far and attenuated out of the night air; and then, for the best part of an hour, an absolute silence.

Suddenly, far off among the trees, Pibby saw a faint gleam of light, moving here and there, and growing bigger as the minutes passed. Presently, he saw that there were four of these gleams, and then six, all moving and dancing about strangely; but no sound; at least, not for a time.

All at once, he heard the snapping of a twig, apparently a long way off in the wood, the sound echoing

Digitized by Google

strangely in the quietness. And then, very abrupt and dreadful, the inhuman howling began again, mingled with a wild screaming, seeming to be but a few hundred paces deep in the woods. To the boy, it seemed as though something that was half a woman and half something else, howled and shrieked there among the trees; and he chilled with a very literal fright.

The six lights danced and blended and again separated, and all the time the abominable howling and screaming continued through the grim woods. Then, very sharp and sudden, the noise of one of Captain Jat's double-barrelled pistols:—bang! bang! And, almost immediately, Captain Jat's voice shouting, at some distance, to bring the boat in, to bring the boat in.

The lad freed the boat-hook, and started the dingy in to the shore, and as he did so, he heard the crashing of Captain Jat's footsteps through the rotten wood and leaves; and it was plain to him that the Captain had started to make an undisguised run for the boat.

As Pibby thrust the boat in-shore, he realised a number of things:—The Captain was being followed, and those lights and the strange howling had something to do with whatever followed him. The nose of the boat grounded, and Pibby picked up his weapon, and ran forrard and stood on the fore thwart, waiting.

The strange lights came nearer, moving swiftly among the trees; and suddenly the lad saw something that was plainly monstrous. He had a clear view up a long vista of dark trees, which the lights had made visible, and he saw the figure of a man, black and immensely tall against the light, running and stagger-

Digitized by Google

ing down towards the beach. He knew it was Captain Jat. The dancing lights, beyond, entered the vista, and came dancing and flaring down through the wood; and abruptly the boy got a clear view of the things that carried them. The lights were great torches, and were carried by a number of wild looking women who were nearly naked, with great manes of hair all loose and wild about them.

But the monstrous and horrid thing that caught the boy's eye was something he saw as the women came nearer, running. They had faces so flat as to be almost featureless. At first, if he thought at all, he supposed that they were wearing some kind of mask; but as they ran, the nearest woman opened her mouth and howled, the same disgusting sound that he had heard earlier that night. As she howled, she brandished both the hand that held the torch, and the other hand, above her head. But she had no hands; her arms ended in enormous claws, like the claws of a great crab. The other women began to howl, and to wave their torches and arms as they ran, and Pibby saw that some of them were like the foremost woman. He stared, with the wide-eyed acceptance of Youth of the horrific and the monstrous.

Captain Jat came blundering and reeling out of the wood. He stubbed his foot against something, and fell headlong on to the sand, and those extraordinary and brutish things close astern of him. Pibby saw suddenly that three of the women had knives, enormous knives, and somehow the sight of the knives made him feel better—it was more human. In the same moment, he loosed off his right barrel and immediately his left, and with each shot there fell a woman,

Digitized by Google

screaming, their torches flying along the sand, and throwing showers of great sparks. Captain Jat staggered up, and came on at a heavy run to the boat. He reached it, and fell all his great length in over the bows.

"Put off, boy!" he gasped. "Put off!" And even as he spoke, the boat was away from the shore with the push that he had given it as he came aboard. He scrambled to his feet, seized an oar, and thrust down hard, so that the water boiled under the stern, with the way that he gave the boat. In a moment, they had the oars between the tholes, and were backing the boat madly out into the darkness of the sea; so that in a few minutes they were a good way off the shore, and the quiet and hush of the water about them.

But there danced on the beach, at the edge of the sea, those monstrous-faced and monstrous-armed women, and howled at them across the sea, and a dreadful enough noise to hear. They waved their great torches, and jigged crazily, so that the light splashed redly across the swells; and all the time as they danced, their black manes flew about them, and always they howled.

"Pull, boy!" said Captain Jat, still very hoarse with breathlessness. "Pull, boy!" But indeed, the lad was pulling fit to break his youthful back. There passed a further time of labour and gasping silence, and presently they were out in the open water, where the quiet swells moved big and free under them in the darkness, and the reef lay between them and the shore. But they could still see the mad dancing of the lights at the edge of the sea.

Digitized by Google

Awhile later, Captain Jat eased, and they put the boat round, after which he lay on his oar, and the boy the same, for he could scarcely breathe. The lights were gone now from the shore, and there was no sound, except the far hollow noise of the breaking seas upon the exposed beaches of the island, to the Eastward.

Now, never a word of thanks said Captain Jat for the way the boy had saved him with the pistol; but presently he pulled his oar in across the boat, and lit his pipe, after which he hove the plug of his tobacco at the lad. That was his way.

"Boy," he said, after smoking a little, "I'm wondering if they knew I was whistlin' to her."

"Who, Sir?" asked Pibby.

But Captain Jat made no answer to this. After smoking a long time, he said, suddenly:—"Them was the Ud-women, boy . . . devil-women. . . . Priestesses of the Ud, that's Devil in their talk. I was here a matter of four years gone for water, and I found out somethin' then, boy, about them an' their pearl-fishin' an' devil-worshipping, an' how they've kep' it quiet from all the world. I found one of the priestesses alone one-time, a little woman an' pretty, not like *them!*" (He jerked his thumb shorewards.) "I was a week lyin' off here, an' there mightn't have been anyone on the island, the way they kep' hid, boy; not till I found the little priestess down near by the spring. I knew her lingo, a bit, and we got talking. I saw her all that week, every night, secret like. She liked me. I liked her. I had her aboard once, an' she told me a heap. When I put her ashore, I took the Mate with me, Jeremiah Stimple, he was, an'

Digitized by Google

we went prospecting for them pearls I'd learned about; but she'd never told me proper about the Ud an' the Ud-women. She'd never say much that way. That's how we got into trouble. We'd near got to the top of the hill, an' then come some of them devil-women. I was all cut about, an' I guess they likely sacrificed the Mate. I never saw him again.

"There must be hundreds of them devil-women ashore there in them forests. But I always meant to come back, boy. I've seen the pearls this very night. They're down in the bottom of the crater that's inside of yon hill in the middle of the island, all strung round a great carved post; an' I'm goin' to get 'em too, boy. You sh'd see the pearls them hag-women was dressed with. You mustn't be feared of their claws, boy. They'm only cast off claw-shells, or somethin' of that sort. Mind you, the little priestess, she said some of 'em was *real*—growed that way; but I can't think it, scarcely. But you never know what you may find in them sorts of places. What their pet Devil is, I don't know. . . ."

"I saw somethin', Sir, after you was gone," began Pibby, interrupting. "It were a 'orrible thing. . . ."

"I saw the little Priestess to-night, down in the crater," went on Captain Jat, without taking the least apparent notice of what the boy had begun to tell him. "I was at the top; it's not all of twenty fathom deep. I whistled soft an' gentle to her. She saw me, an' near did a faint, boy, by the look of her, an' waved me to go away pretty quick. By the look of things down there, they're in for one of their Devil-Festas. They'd big torches burning—you can see the light of 'em now." And Captain Jat nodded towards the island.

Digitized by Google

The lad, Pibby, stared away through the darkness, and surely enough there was a faint loom of light in the night above the island.

"I reck'n the Festa'll be pretty soon now, boy, at the dark of the moon, an' like there'll be chiefs from the islands round for a thousand miles, and a sprinklin' of rotten whites, I guess, and devil-work uncounted. I'm hopin' them devil-priestesses didn't see the little woman wavin' me away, or maybe she'll be into bad trouble. They come on me, just after she signed to me to clear out, an' near finished me before I'd time to slew round. They've butcher's knives, some on 'em, as long as your leg, boy, an' one of 'em near ripped me up." He opened his coat, and the lad saw dimly in the gloom that his shirt was all stained dark.

"I settled four of the brutes," Captain Jat continued, "and you outed two. That's six gone to hell, where they come from. . . ." He broke off, and puffed meditatively at his pipe for a time, leaning on his oar, which rested on the gunnels. Pibby had never heard him talk so much before when sober.

"The native name for yon island means The Island of the Devil, boy," said Captain Jat, presently. "I heard that years gone from more than one; but none of 'em could tell me anythin', or wouldn't, 'cept it was an almighty unhealthy place for a white man . . . or a native either, for that matter, except, maybe, as I'm thinking, when there's one of their big, secret, damn Ud-festas on. . . ." He broke off short, and slipped his pipe into his pocket.

"Pull, boy, an' break your damn back. There's the ship!" he said.

Digitized by Google

Ten minutes later they were safe aboard.

All next day, Captain Jat kept the barque away to the Southward of the island; but he sent Pibby aloft, time and again, with his own telescope; and when that youth came down finally in the late afternoon, to report numbers of small craft on the horizon, steering North, he nodded his head, as if the news were what he had expected.

"Native boats, boy," he said. "Keep your mouth shut, an' tell nothin' to no one. They'll hold that festa to-night, an' they'll have all their pearls strung up, an' we'll be there. You clean up all them big double-barr'lled pistols, an' load 'em nice and careful, like I've showed you. Get a move on you now!"

That night, with all lights dowsed, the barque stood again to the Northward, and dropped Captain Jat and the lad in the dingy, off the island. Captain Jat had four great pistols in his belt, and he had spent the dog-watches in mounting an old duck-gun on its swivel, in the bows of the boat. Pibby, the boy, had also two big heavy pistols tucked into his belt, not to mention his own small weapon which reposed snugly in its canvas pocket inside his trousers. They were quite heavily armed. Moreover, he had seen to it, this time, that the oars were properly muffled.

In addition to these preparations, Captain Jat had been very particular concerning the depositing in the boat of a considerable length of chain, with two stout padlocks in the ends.

Captain Jat took the boat round to the North of the island, and, presently, after pulling cautiously for an hour, he bid the lad ease up and lay on his oar a bit, and keep his eyes well skinned. For his part, the

Digitized by Google

Captain lay down on his stomach on the thwarts, and spied along the surface of the quietly heaving sea, with his night-glass. And suddenly, he reached out and caught Pibby a clip with the glass.

"Down under the gunnel, boy, or they'll see you!" he muttered, and Pibby ducked and slid down under his oar, and stared away breathlessly through the darkness to the Northward.

Now that he had his eyes nearer to the surface of the sea, he discovered the thing that Captain Jat had seen with the night-glass. There was a prodigious string of native boats, within two hundred fathoms of them, paddling through the night to the island. Pibby counted them, and numbered eighty; but probably missed some in the darkness.

Captain Jat allowed these craft to get well in-shore; then, taking his oar, he shoved it out through a steering-grommet, which he had fixed up in the stern, and began to scull steadily after them; but allowing nothing more than his hand and forearm to rise above the gunnel of the boat. As the dingy crept into the wake of all those silent craft ahead, the boy noticed suddenly that there had come again above the island the strange loom of light that he had seen the night before.

Presently, the heave of the sea had almost died from under the boat, and it was plain that they had come under the lee of some out-jutting "lie" of rocks. The last of the craft ahead vanished into the shadow of the island; but Captain Jat had marked the place, and followed dead on. A minute later, they saw the shore directly ahead, not a score of fathoms away; but there was no beach; only the dark trees and bushes coming

Digitized by Google

right down, apparently to the water's edge. There was no heave at all now under the boat, so that they had evidently been piloted into a perfectly sheltered cove.

Captain Jat kept the boat going straight ahead. He made no attempt to slacken her way, despite the fact that they seemed to be heading straight ashore into the middle of the heavy underwood. The bows of the dingy reached the dank bushes, where they hung out over the water, and Captain Jat took both hands to his oar, and forced her in among them.

For a few moments the overgrowths seemed to smother the boat, all wet and slimy and rank. Then the boat had passed clean through, into open water beyond. Pibby, the lad, stared in front into the darkness; but could see nothing. He looked upward, and saw a narrow, winding ribbon of night-sky far above them, which told him that Captain Jat had discovered the way into a deep-set tidal passage, the mouth of which was completely masked by the undergrowths and overhanging trees. It was, obviously, a huge crack through the side of the low crater, which the sea had turned into a creek.

Very cautiously, Captain Jat sculled ahead. It was like sculling into a pitch black night, so black that the far upward ribbon of night-sky seemed almost to shine, by comparison. As they went, little hollow sobbing sounds, of the water in the crannies of the unseen rocky sides, came to them, dankly and somehow drearily. But Captain Jat handled the sculling oar so softly that not once did the clinker-built entry of the boat "mutter" on the water. And this way quite half an hour passed; though it seemed much

Digitized by Google

longer, going utterly slow and silent and cautious in that grim dark, and steering by the winding pattern of the night-sky above, and by the odd vague sense which told the Captain when they were come over-near to one side or the other, in the darkness.

Once, as they went so quiet and stealthy, there came to them indefinitely out of the night, a far howling, once and then again; and, later, an attenuated, incredibly shrill screaming, that died away and left the boy frightened and holding the stocks of his heavy pistols. But Captain Jat sculled steadily on.

Abruptly, Captain Jat ceased sculling, and stood silent. It was plain to the lad that he was either listening or staring intently; and the boy peered round, every way, nervously. Suddenly, he saw an indefinite glow of light ahead, evidently beyond a bend in the narrow creek. The glow grew rapidly into a bright light, that danced and flickered, and, in the space of a minute, there came round the bend of the creek, upon the left side, two of those brutish things that had followed the Captain the night before. They were running through the stunted trees and bushes, parallel with the course of the creek, but about twenty feet above the level of the water, winding in and out, as they went, among the trees and great bushes that grew up in the steep lower slope of the creek-side. Their agility was incredible; here and there they leaped like goats from rock to rock, their torches dripping and flaring, as they ran, one behind the other.

Captain Jat stood motionless in the stern of the dingy, with his oar in one hand, and one of his pistols in the other. He watched the two beastly creatures run by, and the boy—glancing at him swiftly in his

Digitized by Google

fright—saw that his face was perfectly calm; but the lights from the torches seemed to glow in his eyes, so that they shone, almost like the eyes of a wild animal.

The lad's gaze jumped back to the two running brutes. He could not see their hideous flat faces; for their great manes, all loose and wild, hung over them, damp and black and matted, as if they were fresh come up out of the sea; and indeed there was rank, wet weed, all entangled in their hair; for he saw it glisten in the blaze of the torches. Yet, though he could not see their faces, he saw their arms from their naked shoulders downward. The arms of the foremost woman ended in two monstrous claws; but the boy saw plainly that they were no more than the cast-off shells of some huge sea reptile, if I may so describe it. He saw where they ended, rough and rude, just below her elbows, and that her right hand came through a hole between the mandibles of the claw, to hold her great torch.

But the second woman gave him a horrible feeling; he could not see where her arms ended and the claws began. He remembered what the little priestess had told Captain Jat. And even as he stared, frightened and horrified, the two creatures were gone past. He saw then that the foremost one had an ugly great knife, stuck naked into the back of a kind of broad belt; and the belt was all stitched with what at first he took to be big shining beads. Then, he realised that perhaps they were not beads, but pearls, as the Captain had told him. Yet it was less of that possible fortune in pearls that Pibby Tawles, the boy, thought in that tense moment, than of the fact that he could

Digitized by Google

not see where the arms of the second woman ended and the claws began.

Then the two running, leaping bestial things were gone away down the creek; and a minute after, they were out of sight round one of the rocky bends, and all was dark again about the boat.

The dingy began to move ahead once more in the darkness, as Captain Jat took up work again with the sculling-oar. A matter of some ten minutes of silence passed, with the water of the creek making odd gurglings and echoes on either hand among the crannies and holes in the rocks, when Pibby realised that the enormous, steep sides of the creek had joined overhead, and that they were moving forward through the complete blackness of an invisible cavern.

And then, even as he realised the fact uneasily, there showed far ahead a small, bright spot of light. The boat began to sway, and a little murmur broke out under her bows, as Captain Jat increased the speed; but he eased it at once, for the faint noise of the water under her entrance, made a strangely loud sound in that silence. But still they moved ahead steadily, and that speck of light grew, until the lad saw that it was an inner mouth to the cavern, and beyond it some bright flaring light.

The boat approached, unseen in the darkness of the cavern, to within a dozen fathoms of this newly discovered entrance, and for the last minute, Pibby had been staring with a fixed and astounded interest at what he saw. The arch of the cave mouth must have been fully thirty feet high, and the width of it a little less. And through this great opening, Pibby was looking into a big circular space, apparently several

Digitized by Google

hundred feet across, the walls of which went up out of his sight into the darkness above.

But what fixed both his and Captain Jat's attention was the centre portion of this extraordinary natural amphitheatre; for in the centre was a small lake of sea-water, maybe about sixty feet across, and out of the centre of the lake there rose a weed-hung hump of rock, and from the centre of the hump of rock there rose a great pole, maybe fifty feet in height, black through all its length, and polished so highly that it reflected brilliantly the light of six enormous torches that burned on the tops of six great piles that stood up out of the rock all round the central pool or lake. And this pole, from its grotesquely carved head, flat-faced and repulsive, to its base, where it had been cut into the shape of a bunch of huge claws, was banded every few feet with strings of countless beads, that glimmered in a semi-luminous fashion in the flare of the torch-lights. *And every bead was a pearl.*

The water from the cavern in which the dingy floated, ran in a perfectly straight channel into the central pool or lake, and the weeded floor of the ancient crater rose a foot or so on each side, spreading away then in one level, brown, weed-covered reach to the great walls of the inside of the low mountain.

The torches showed that the bottom parts of the mountain walls were all grown with weed, to a height of about six feet above the bottom of the crater, so that it was plain that the sea, entering through the creek and the cavern, rose at high tide to at least that height, in which case there would be only the six great torches and the lofty polished black pole in the centre, with its profusion of strings of pearls, visible

Digitized by Google

when the tide was up. It must have been a strange sight then, even stranger than when Captain Jat and Pibby looked out at it from the cavern.

And now, but not very distinctly in that light, Pibby saw where all that great line of boats had gone to; for there, so far as he could see all around the bottom of the great natural amphitheatre, were the boats, where they had been drawn up, head to stern upon the weed, and scarcely seen above the weed, out of which they rose only a little, except for their lofty head and stern timbers, which, however, had been so draped with weed as to blend with the weed-grown walls behind.

Over the sides of all these boats, and there were vastly more than the flotilla that they had followed in (for they lay side by side, apparently three or four deep), Captain Jat and the lad saw the heads of hundreds and hundreds of natives; but all vague and indistinct; both because of the uncertain flarings of the great torches, and because each native had dressed his head with a mass of the weed. Indeed, it would have been easy to have entered the crater, under the impression that there was no more life in it than the blaze of the huge torches.

As Pibby strained his eyes to make out the boats, wondering whether it had been hard to drag them up out of the creek, and across the weed, he felt the dingy beginning to move silently back into the cavern; and, turning, he saw that Captain Jat was using his oar noiselessly, as an Indian uses his paddle, and so fetching the boat gently astern.

In this way they progressed for about a hundred yards, and then Captain Jat set the dingy in to the

Digitized by Google

side, and began to grope along. Presently, he gave out a little grunt of satisfaction, and pushed the boat across to the other side; but was evidently unable to find what he wanted; for he continued to punt the boat astern with his hands, until the great opening of the cave appeared no more than a distant speck of light. Then he grunted again, and immediately sent the boat across once more to the other side. A minute later, he gave out a further note of satisfaction, and suddenly Pibby heard his voice muttering to him to pass up one end of the chain, and one of the padlocks.

He heard the Captain fumbling for a time, and the odd, slight chinking of the chain; then the dingy was thrust out again, and Captain Jat was bidding him pay out the chain gently without a sound, whilst he paddled the boat once more across. They reached the other side; and Pibby grasped his Master's idea, which was obviously to put a chain boom across, slackly, so that if they had to retreat in a hurry, they could pass over it; then tauten it up, and padlock it in position, and so get away easily, whilst all the boats of the pursuers ran foul of the boom.

The boy ran his hands in along the chain, where the Captain was working, and found that he was "anchoring" it round a huge boulder. Pibby had no doubt but that the other end was quite as efficiently secured, and he began to feel comfortable again in his mind; it was such an efficient retreat. Then, as he sat in the darkness, he fell to wondering just what those natives were waiting for, all hid with weed like they were . . . and the great torches . . . and the huge, carved and polished pole with the fortune of splendid pearls strung about it.

Digitized by Google

And then, as he worried the thought over nervously in his mind, he thrilled suddenly; for Captain Jat was once more sculling the boat ahead towards the brightly shining arch of the cavern's entrance into the arena.

Abruptly, as the boat forged ahead, there came a queer swirl deep down in the dark water, somewhere astern of the boat, that sent little waves into the sides of the gloomy cavern, breaking in the darkness with a multitudinous chattering of liquid sounds. Something huge passed under the boat, which was now approaching the entrance at a fair speed. They felt the great thing pass under them, deep below the surface, but drawing after it a wave that humped the boat up, stern first, and then the bows.

"My God!" said Captain Jat huskily, aloud. . . . "The UD!" His voice came back, husky and dreadful, from a thousand places in the darkness:—"My God! . . . The UD! My God! . . . The UD!" And in the same moment, Pibby felt the dingy begin to sway heavily, and heard Captain Jat gasp, as he began sculling with a kind of mad violence, whispering:—"The Little Priestess! The Little Priestess! My God! They saw her waving! My . . ."

Pibby never heard any more; for they had come sufficiently near the arch now for him to be able to see again into the crater with some clearness. He stared in complete and dreadful amazement; for though the whole of the great amphitheatre was as silent as when they left it, there was now a little, naked brown woman, lashed by her neck, her waist and her ankles to the great, pearl-stringed central pole that came up out of the hump or rock in the pool. She had been

Digitized by Google

brought there and made fast during that time in which they had been fixing up the chain boom. That was why the weed-hidden boats waited. . . . She was the sacrifice . . . The thing that had passed under the boat . . . ! She had been seen waving to the Captain. . . . She . . .

The chaos of his thoughts stilled abruptly into a fearful attention. He bent forward from the forethwart, and stared, almost petrified. Something was coming up out of the water, climbing up on to the hump of rock. . . . Enormous legs were coming up out of the pool, scrambling at the rock, slipping, slipping, and tearing away great chunks of the weed, and finally effecting a hold. A moment afterwards, a thing like a vast, brown, shell-encrusted dish-cover, as big as an ordinary old-fashioned oval mahogany table, began to rise up out of the pool.

The boy shook as he stared; he did not know that such things existed. . . . A crab. . . .! That was no word for it. It was a monster, capable of destroying an elephant. . . . He remembered the great thing that had slipped and slithered among the big rocks at the in-shore end of the reef. The thing was rising higher and higher. Nothing could save the woman . . . nothing on earth! They had better get away at once, before it discovered them. The thing was reaching out three of its great, pincer-armed legs towards the little brown woman, who began now to scream in a peculiar, breathless voice. Then Pibby was suddenly caught by the shoulder from behind, and Captain Jat dashed him aft into the stern-sheets of the dingy, out of his way. As he fell, he saw Captain Jat against the light; he had the great

Digitized by Google

duck-gun in his hands. Pibby remembered that it was loaded with the thick end of a broken marlin-spike. There was a rip of fire, that coincided with the flashes of light he saw as his head met the stern-thwart; there was a crashing thump of sound that added to the muddle of his fall, and Captain Jat pitched bodily backward on to the top of him, literally felled by the recoil of the big weapon. The boy screamed, and everything went grey for a moment; then Captain Jat rolled free of him, and in the same moment there was a vast thrashing of water, and the boat was cast up a yard into the air by a wave that came travelling down the cavern from the crater. The dingy slewed half round, rolled heavily, and shipped several gallons; then steadied.

Pibby staggered to his feet, shaken and sick. He stared towards the pool; the water appeared to be boiling all about the hump of rock; but there was no sign of the thing that had come out of the water. The boiling motion of the water began to ease, and Pibby saw that the little brown woman sagged in her lashings against the carved black pole; but there was no mark on her to show that she had been hurt; she had become unconscious.

The next thing he knew, he had an oar in his hand, and Captain Jat had another, and they were out of the great cavern, and pulling madly up the channel that cut across the floor of the crater to the pool. He noticed, with a curious inconsequence, that he could now see trees far up at the top of the walls of the crater, shaking a little in the night-wind against the stars.

The boat bumped into the masses of weed about the

Digitized by Google

hump of rock, and Captain Jat gave one great spring upward, and was on to the rock, having used his oar against the bottom-boards, as a kind of vaulting-pole. His effort forced the boat away; but Pibby grabbed the boat-hook, jabbed it into a mass of the weed, and pulled her back. He saw Captain Jat sawing savagely at the lashings; and was conscious for the first time that the crater was full of a wild yelling. He saw his Master pluck the little brown woman loose, and the next moment she was hove down into the boat, with a crash. He did not look at her, but at Captain Jat. . . . Captain Jat was reaching up, and slashing at the lowest string of great pearls. The string gave, and the pearls went spraying and bounding all over the hump of rock, into the water; but Captain Jat had secured a hand-full.

A spear struck the polished pole, chipping it, and flew off to the side, passing through Captain Jat's sleeve. The boy glanced once now round at the arena, and saw, suddenly, that there were literally hundreds and hundreds of natives, scrambling and slipping and leaping over the weed-covered floor towards them. He saw also another thing; two of the horrible, claw-armed women were slashing at a native with their great knives; it may have been the man who had thrown the spear and chipped the post. . . . The post was obviously an incredibly sacred thing.

He heard his own voice shouting strangely to Captain Jat to come; but that indomitable length of man had swarmed a fathom up the polished pole, and was cutting loose another string of the pearls. There came a shower of them bounding on to the rock, and into the weed and water; but again Captain Jat had secured

Digitized by Google

a share. He gave one leap to the rock, and another into the boat; then, stern-foremost, they rowed grimly for the opening into the cavern.

One of the savages, a huge fat man, had out-distanced the others, in spite of his fat. Perhaps his fat accounted for it; for he had come across the slippery weed, creeping on hands and feet, and had therefore lost no time in falling. He rose up at the edge of the channel; but as he made to spring at the boat, he slipped and fell squelching on his back, and Captain Jat pistolled him calmly as he lay.

Yet, now the danger was appalling; for scores of the natives were getting near, and a shower of spears came over the boat, four of them striking her starboard quarter, and making it look literally rather like a gigantic pin-cushion; but no one was hurt; though the Captain's clothing was cut in two places. They replied with their heavy pistols, and left a dozen of the natives dead, and so managed to ram the dingy stern first into the cavern.

Captain Jat put the boat round, as soon as they were well out of sight, and they both settled down to pull. Yet when they had gone about a hundred fathoms they heard a splash, and saw that one of the smaller native boats had already been hauled across the weed, and was now in the water of the channel. They knew that in another few minutes there would be scores of boats after them.

Half a minute later, Pibby's oar stubbed against the slack chain of the boom, and they in oars, and hauled the boat along to the side of the cavern, being now on the seaward side of the boom. Captain Jat worked desperately, and Pibby lighted the chain up

Digitized by Google

to him, so as to get it as taut as possible; yet it took time; for they were in utter darkness; but the chain must be taut, if it were to act as a boom; otherwise the natives would manage either to shove their boats under or over it.

And all the time, as they worked, boats were entering the mouth of the great cavern, with torches held high over their bows to show them the way; while the boat that had been first launched into the creek was now scarcely a hundred and fifty feet away; and still Captain Jat growled to Pibby to "light up the slack! Light up the slack!"

The small boat came on steadily, until she was not more than seventy or eighty feet away, and suddenly a great shout told Captain Jat and the boy that the light of the distant torches must have picked them out in the blackness. Immediately afterwards, all around them in the water there was, plunk, plunk, the noise of thrown spears. There came a sharp, chinking sound, as a single spear struck the rocky side. It glanced, gashed along the Captain's face, and took away a part of his ear. He swore grimly, and gave one more pull on the chain; then closed the big padlock and locked it with a swift deliberation.

Immediately afterwards, he fetched a spare pistol out of his side pocket, and loosed off into the approaching boat, with such good aim that one of his bullets punched a hole in two of the men, who happened to be in a line. Then, dropping his pistol into the bottom of the boat, he sprang to his oar, and a minute later they were away round the bend, bumping heavily in the darkness against the rocky side of the cavern, and listening to the fierce outcry that came

Digitized by Google

echoing along the cavern, as the boom opposed all progress for the time being.

"Done 'em, boy!" said Captain Jat. "Now pull easy! We don't want the boat stove. Back water when I sings out." And therewith the two settled down to work at the oars.

Some forty minutes later, they passed through the screen of overhanging bushes and trees that masked the mouth of the creek, and were presently out into the wholesome sweetness of the sea, with the island no more than a shape of darkness astern. Yet, when they came to look for the little brown woman, she had gone. It was evident that she had come-to, and slipped overboard in the darkness, preferring, it appears, to face any risk that the island might contain for her, to the facing of the unknown.

"The ship, boy! Pull!" said Captain Jat, a little while afterwards. And, indeed, the ship it was; and soon they were safely aboard, steering Northward, away from the island, for good this time.

Down in his cabin, with the door safely closed, yet not without more than one suspicious glance towards it, Captain Jat was presently conning over, and exhibiting to Pibby, his spoils. On the table was a jug of very special toddy, and Captain Jat was investigating it with the aid of his big pewter mug. Pibby also, it must be confessed, had adopted a fairish sized drinking cup for the same purpose; for Captain Jat allowed him only the one, and no more.

It may be that the unusual richness of the toddy developed a latent generosity in the lean Captain; for after a lot of fingering and weighing and examining, he presented to Pibby, as his share, one of the

Digitized by Google

smallest of the pearls, which had been somewhat badly chipped.

Pibby Tawles, cabin-boy-deck-hand, call him what you will, took the little, damaged pearl with sufficient evidences of gratitude. He could afford to; for inside his shirt there reposed a number of pearls as fine as any that Captain Jat had brought away with him. The boy had picked them off the bottom-boards of the dingy, where they had fallen when his Master cut the strings of pearls about the Sacred Pole.

In short, we may conclude, I think, that whatever else he might be, Pibby Tawles was one who had a very sound eye to the main chance; a conclusion which a further adventure of Captain Jat's has rather impressed upon me.

Digitized by Google

CAPTAIN JAT

THE ADVENTURE OF THE HEADLAND

"RUM, boy; an' pass me up the spy-glass!" said Captain Jat, without turning his head.

"'i, 'i, Sir," cried Pibby Tawles.

Even as he made answer, Pibby was half-way to the companion-hatch, at a bare-foot run; for he had learned the need for speed, during his two voyages with Captain Jat . . . that unabashed length of lean, pirate-hearted avarice and grim whimsies.

Pibby Tawles was back in something under sixty seconds, running, as he would have expressed it, at the rate of knots. He reached the telescope over in front of his master, who lounged upon the rail, staring intensely at the dull gloom of the land to leeward, where it lay still and mysterious in the grey of the dawn. Captain Jat took the telescope, without a word, and Pibby Tawles put the pewter mug of rum-toddy down on the rail beside him. It may be that he set it too near to his Master; for as Captain Jat adjusted the glass towards the shore, his elbow touched the mug, and the lot went to the deck, so that the rum was all squandered.

Captain Jat turned slowly and looked at Pibby Tawles; then pointed with the glass at the main

Digitized by Google

t'gallant brace. Pibby knew what he meant, and knew equally well that it was no use making a fuss; so that he went over and brought the end of the brace, without a word. Captain Jat took the rope, and caught the boy three or four hard clips with it across the shoulders; after which he returned it to him, to be re-coiled. He touched the fallen pewter with his foot, and the boy said:—"'i, 'i, Sir," and went below with the pewter to fill it again.

He returned at a run, and put it handy for the second time; yet not, as you may think, over-near to the great protruding elbow of his Master. Then he coiled up the t'gallant brace, and went to leeward, where he rubbed his shoulders tenderly against a teak weather-cloth stanchion; for Captain Jat had laid on hard.

"Rum, boy," said the Captain again, presently. And when Pibby returned with the pewter full, Captain Jat turned and took it from him, at the same time pushing the spy-glass into his hands, and jerking his thumb towards the land, by which Pibby knew that he was given permission to have a look. That was just Captain Jat's way.

Pibby Tawles stared earnestly through the glass at the vague shore of the great headland, past which they were running; for he knew from the half-drunken talk of Captain Jat, oddwhiles over his rum-toddy, something of what the Captain had in his mind.

"I don't see nothin' of the two rocks, Cap'n," said Pibby, after staring a while.

"They're there, boy!" said Captain Jat, with grim conviction. "An' don't you get doubtin', or I'll break your head. That Portygee as gave me the yarn,

Digitized by Google

swore to it on the cross he'd got hung to 's beads. . . . He wouldn't be like to lie, with him dyin' an' half way down into hell already, as you might say."

Pibby made no reply to this; for it was evident that his Master was in one of his curious moods, when he was capable of a peculiar, though casual, sort of brutality, if angered by any difference of opinion, or by any other cause at all.

The headland was still half blurred with the indefinite greyness of the dawn, and the boy searched to and fro vainly along the crest of the cliff, for any sign of the Dago village which some of Captain Jat's oddly jerked out remarks had given him to suppose must exist. For the Captain had often half-drunkenly explained how this village would be the thing that would prove the chief difficulty in the way of their making any proper search to test the information which he had been given by the Portuguese. Pibby doubted that "given." He knew too much of the uncomfortably remorseless note in his Captain's character.

The boy continued to stare—watching the smother of the white seas upon the beaches around the headland, and vaguely aware how they seemed to shout the loneliness and savage unknownness of the land under the barque's lee. Then, with the "tail of his eye," he saw Captain Jat raise the pewter to rap him across the knuckles; so that he knew the Captain was done his grog, and wanted the spy-glass again. He thrust the glass into his Master's hands, and caught the pewter from him; after which he went below to prepare breakfast.

Now, all the while that Captain Jat was at break-

Digitized by Google

fast, the boy, who ate with him, pondered the adventure that he saw ahead. The Mate was on deck, and the bo'sun—who acted as Second Mate—was turned-in; for Captain Jat would never eat with his officers; preferring in some strange, half-sullen, half-suspicious fashion, the company of Pibby. As you know, he would never talk before his two Mates; but to the boy he would say anything that came uppermost; so that, as I have said, Pibby was more or less (though somewhat hazily) aware of what was in his Master's mind. Yet, at present, the Captain's speech was limited to such remarks as:—

"Beans, boy!" Whereat, Pibby would ladle him a huge plate-full of his favourite dish, which consisted of beans and salt-pork, done with red pepper.

"Rum, boy!" And Pibby would re-fill his Master's pewter; but did Pibby make a movement to add to the one cup-full of the heavy liquor that was his own allowance, the roar of Captain Jat's voice would warn him that he was watched; whereat the boy would fall-to once more upon the beans and red pepper; but the pork was a dainty that went all to his Master's plate.

"There's them Dagoes!" said Captain Jat, presently. "Yon dead Portygee made out as they was always searchin', off an' on, ever since it come out that the treasure was brought safe ashore out the *Lady Meria.* Yon devil as is dead, says they've got the yarn fixed in 'em; an' they'm terrible cranky to see strangers comin' ashore round by yon. Like as they'm thinkin' maybe, as they might be comed lookin' for the gold, or whatever it is. If we's catched, boy, they'll sure cut our throats proper."

Digitized by Google

"How did the Portygee get to know the bearin's, Cap'n?" asked Pibby.

But his Master went on eating, as if the boy had not spoken.

"We'll run up the coast a while, boy," remarked Captain Jat, after some further minutes of eating and drinking. "I'll run 'er back here after dark, so's we can land safe; an' they can't think nothin' then; for they won't see ought! You get them pistols cleaned up an' loaded after breakfas'. An' rout out them two shovels an' picks we used down in the islands."

"'i, 'i, Cap'n," said Pibby, well pleased at the prospect of the coming adventure. And therewith, in his delight, he re-filled his Master's pewter, with rum; forestalling Captain Jat's monotonous "Rum, boy!"

For his pains, Captain Jat fetched him a clout across the side of the head, with his open fist, that sent him to the deck of the cabin.

"A drunken sailorman it is ye think I am!" roared Captain Jat, angrily; and immediately drained the pewter at a gulp; whilst Pibby got again upon his feet and began to clear the table.

"Have you got a chart, Cap'n, where to find the stuff?" he asked, presently, as he went to and fro. But Captain Jat, who had now lit his pipe, puffed on silently, taking no notice of the lad.

That night, the little *Gallat* crept back along the coast, with all her lights out, or covered; and a little after midnight dropped her squat dingy under the lee of the big headland.

In the boat there were only Captain Jat and Pibby Tawles, the boy; and both of them wore big canvas

Digitized by Google

belts which the sailmaker had made, in which were stuck half a dozen big double-barrelled pistols a-piece. In addition, they had each their big sheath-knives; and so were very well armed.

In the bottom of the boat, there were two picks and a couple of shovels; also a large canvas bag, the neck tied up with a rope-yarn.

Captain Jat had the stroke oar, and rowed standing, with his face to the bows. In this way (the oars having been previously muffled with parcellings of canvas and shakins) they had the boat presently inshore, under the lee of the cliff, where the foot of the headland made a "still" water. And here, in the almost total darkness, they got ashore; taking their gear with them, and drawing the boat up a few feet on to the beach, making fast her painter to a rock.

The shore about them was very dree and silent; but farther off in the darkness, there was the lonesome, eternal roar of the surf, on the unprotected coast beyond the lee of the headland, and the two of them stood for a little while, staring cautiously about them in the gloom, and listening. Then Captain Jat cuffed the boy, to ease himself; afterwards cursing him because the blows sounded loud and distinct along the empty shore; and so had him to shoulder the two picks, whilst the Captain himself took the two spades and the canvas bag.

They started along the shore then, towards where it slanted up into the gloom-hidden side of the great headland, all dark with heavy forest. Yet, the long, lean man appeared to have no doubt about his direction; but seemed, as it were by some peculiar instinct, to know his way; for presently he was leading along

Digitized by Google

a narrow beaten track, up from the shore, which took them winding in and out, zigzagging among the trees.

In this fashion, they walked steadily for maybe half an hour; by which time they were gone up so high, and had passed so far in among the great trees, that they were come clear away from the noise of the sea; and all about them was the heavy, almost insufferable hush of the great forests.

At times, as they walked, there would be a low, uncomfortable rustling, as some hidden thing slid away from their path; and once, for a space, Pibby Tawles felt sure that something was keeping level with them through the darkness, a little way on their right. But presently, he lost the sounds, and ceased to be certain that he had heard anything. Oddwhiles, as they went, a crude stench, something like garlic, would assail them, as though their feet had crushed some odd, strange plant in the darkness. And so they went forward.

Three times in that first dark half-hour, Pibby, the boy, stumbled heavily over the loops of rambling creeper-plants, and the third time he went headlong. The two picks he was carrying, clanged loudly—the noise going strange and somehow horridly through the dark aisles that went unseen among the trees on both sides of them. Captain Jat said nothing; but turned and clouted the boy as he rose; after which they went forward once more, without a word.

A while later, they were come to the great brow of the headland; and here Captain Jat paused and knelt down among the roots of a big tree. He drew something from his pocket, fumbling in the darkness; then

Digitized by Google

Pibby heard the strokes of a flint and steel, and saw the showers of sparks light up the face of a small compass that lay on the earth between the Captain's knees. His Master ceased to strike the flint; and rose to his feet again, pocketing the compass; after which he slewed about to the South and East, and set off again, with Pibby Tawles astern of him.

Four times more, Captain Jat took his bearings in this rough and ready fashion; each time altering his direction slightly; and so came out, at last, free of the trees, into a kind of rocky, bush and tree lumbered plateau, upon the Western border of which glimmered and danced the flames of several fires; whilst in two places there were the movements of torches.

"That'll be the Dago village, boy," muttered Captain Jat, shading his eyes needlessly, and staring. "Bear away smart to starboard; an' if you knocks them picks again, our throats is as good as cut proper; so you mind, or I'll clump ye in the lug!"

They bore away to the right now, going carefully in the darkness, and entered presently a wide belt of wood. Abruptly, Captain Jat reached back to Pibby, and dragged him in among the trees to the left of the vague track that led through the wood-belt. As he seized the boy, the Captain clapped one great hand momentarily over the lad's mouth, to insure that he would not shout or try to question the meaning of this sudden act. Then he loosed him, and peered forward, sideways, among the trees.

A moment later, Pibby discovered the reason for his Master's action; there was a far off flickering of light, away amid the trees, in the direction towards which they had been going.

Digitized by Google

The lights came nearer swiftly, with a queer, dancing sort of motion; and Captain Jat backed in more among the trees on the side of the track; pressing Pibby to his rear, and swearing softly in a constant monotone of evil. Maybe a couple of minutes passed; and then Pibby was aware that he heard the swish of branches in the near distance; and, suddenly, he heard another sound, most peculiar—a kind of queer, moaning, hooning noise, very faint at first, but drawing nearer all the time, and growing sharper and more insistent as it neared their hiding-place.

Pibby Tawles felt for one of his pistols, and fingered it with a distinct sense of comfort; also, it was good to feel that Captain Jat's sinful length of cantankerousness and fighting-energy was close beside him; but, for all that he had these two realities to ease him of funk, yet that sound bred in him an ever-growing discomfort and vague distress of unwordable thoughts.

And then, suddenly, the sound rose to a veritable hooning buzz, and there raced past them, two sweating, breathless natives, brown and glistening in the light of the great torches they carried. They ran past along the track, towards the village maybe; and Pibby Tawles discovered the reason for that deep, insistent, threatening buzz, that had sounded so strange; for around the head of each man, there hung a moving, stupendously thick cloud of insect life, whirling round and round the men . . . a dancing, flickering, buzzing haze of mosquitoes, gnats, midges, beetles, and other pests of the tropic night, attracted to the men by the light of the torches they carried.

Digitized by Google

The two natives dashed past at top speed, drenched with sweat, and peering in a kind of extraordinary terror from side to side as they ran; as though expecting every moment to be faced with some horrific or terrible creature. And in this fashion, they were gone a good way off in less than a minute; so that the sound of their travel died away in the distance, along with the extraordinary noise of the huge, travelling clouds of insects that accompanied them.

"This is sure an Ud wood," muttered Captain Jat. "Devil wood, boy, 'tis sure; or them niggers 'd never carry torches like they'm doin', an' fetchin' every insec' from a mile round to feed on their thick hides!"

Captain Jat left the hiding place, and Pibby Tawles followed; and so they led off once more along the track, the Captain ahead.

"Keep an eye liftin', boy, for aught!" said Captain Jat, presently. "Them niggers may just be superstitious-like about here, or maybe as there's somethin' loose in these woods as is real dangerous. You can't never tell with them silly devils. They'd run from a pretty coloured stone, thinkin' 'twas witchcraft, an' the same time, they'd cut your blessed throat an' never stop to argy. Don't never trust 'em. . . . An' then, again, there *may* be somethin' queer round about 'ere. . . ."

He broke off short, and stopped in his tracks, to listen; whipping out one of his big pistols. Pibby Tawles saw the action, vaguely, and followed his Master's lead; and so the two of them stood silent for maybe two full minutes there in the darkness among the trees.

Digitized by Google

"Sst!" muttered Captain Jat, suddenly. "Hark to that!"

Pibby also had heard it—a far away, deep, gigantic sound, that would have been somehow more familiar, had it been a noise of less dimensions. This is, perhaps, rather a peculiar way to put it; but it describes the particular fashion in which the origin of the sound eluded them.

"It's the sea, Cap'n," suggested Pibby, after a further pause for listening; during which there was an absolute silence, save for the odd, vague whisper of leaves here and there in the darkness, as the night airs stole, hushed, through the wood-belt.

"The sea be blowed!" said Captain Jat; swearing grimly in a mutter of vast contempt. "Keep your ears open, an' shut your mug! That's maybe some native devil-work, to make strangers give hereabouts a wide berth; an', again, maybe it's somethin' you nor me don't understan'. . . . Keep your eyes skinned, boy; an' tread quiet!"

He led off again down the scarcely perceptible track; and so, in something under an hour, they were come clear out from the wood, to the great ease of Pibby, who had disliked hugely that peculiar sound in the distant night among the trees.

Beyond the wood, the track wound round the base of a large mound, which Captain Jat climbed and proceeded to take a bearing from, as Pibby could tell from the sparks of the flint and steel. The Captain came down off the mound, and led the way to the left, going slowly and cautiously.

They went forward now for a short while through a patch of rocky country, clumped here and there

Digitized by Google

with masses of heavy brush, out of which grew stunted trees. Twice during their walk across this part, Captain Jat took their bearings with the compass. And presently, Pibby Tawles realised that the Captain was listening keenly for some expected sound; going always more slowly, and at last stopping every score paces or so, to hark.

Abruptly, Captain Jat started off to the right, towards a vaguely seen straggle of trees and undergrowth, with Pibby after him. Pibby heard the sound then, the noise of falling water, and realised that it was towards this that his Master was making a way. They ploughed in among the undergrowth, and burst a path in the direction of the sound. In a few minutes, during which the noise of the falling water had grown louder and louder, they came out into a great open space, with rocks going up all about, so well as they could see in the darkness; and the noise of the water very plain now from some place to their left.

They followed up to the sound, and came to a boil of water, where a pretty big brook came tumbling down over the top of a little cliff, as they could learn, part by indefinite sight, and part by the noise of the water.

"There's them two sharp-ended rocks as the Portygee told on, boy," said Captain Jat, with satisfaction in his voice, "like as he said we should see 'em."

He pointed up through the darkness, to where, about twenty fathoms on their own side of the waterfall, the edge of the low cliff rose into two tall pinnacles of rock, black against the night sky.

Digitized by Google

"I'm thinkin' I've found it, boy, 'thout foulin' ought," continued Captain Jat, setting down the two spades and the bag upon the earth, and hauling a small lantern out of his pocket. He busied himself clumsily with his flint and steel, and presently had the small lantern alight. He put the lantern on the ground, and undid the mouth of the canvas bag; out of which he took two large balls of spunyarn.

The balls were of unequal size, and he handed the larger to Pibby, telling him to climb the low cliff, and shin up the right hand rock-pinnacle; after which he was put to the bowline, in the end of the spunyarn, over the spike of the rock, and heave the ball down to him.

Pibby put down his two picks, took off his shoes, and made the ball fast round his shoulders. Then he climbed the little cliff and the right pinnacle, and put the bowline over the spiked end. He climbed down to the top of the cliff again, and called softly to the Captain to stand from under; after which he cast the ball down into the shadows where his Master waited.

"Right, boy!" muttered Captain Jat. "Catch! Do same on t'other." And he hove the second ball up to him. Pibby caught it, more by feel than sight, and made it fast round the top of the left pinnacle; throwing the ball likewise to his Master. Then he came down the cliff again, to give a hand.

Captain Jat led the way Eastward, unrolling the balls of yarn as he went. Pibby followed, carrying the lantern and his two picks. Presently, Captain Jat had come to the end of the smaller ball, and so veered away to the left, until the right-hand yarn had

Digitized by Google

run out. Then he tautened them up, and where the ends of the two lines met, when they were taut, he set his heel down, and reached out for the lantern.

He held the light down over the ground, and Pibby saw that the Captain was standing on a piece of rock, covered pretty loose with blown sand and thin earth. Wind and weather had freed the edges of earth and sand, and Pibby realised that the piece of rock was thin; but near a fathom across, every way.

"Fetch them spades, boy," said the Captain, giving him a jab in the rib with his elbow. "Smart now!"

Pibby ran for the spades and the bag. When he returned, his Master bid him hold the light down over the rock; and whilst the boy held the light, Captain Jat cleared away the sand and earth, with one of the spades, and laid the rock bare.

It was a rough, natural slab of stuff, and if Captain Jat had not been remarkably strong, they would have had trouble with it. As it was, the Captain had first to split it across, with one of the picks, the sounds of the blows echoing over-far into the night; after which he forced the edge of a spade in under one end of each piece, in turn, and hove them up, whilst Pibby shoved stones underneath. Then they bent their backs to the work, and with great heaves, they had them clear, and at last were looking down into a bit of a hole in the rock beneath.

Captain Jat snatched the light from the boy, and held it down into the hole; but there was nothing in it, except an old copper cylinder, all green with verdigris, that lay half-bedded in the sand and earth that had sifted in.

Digitized by Google

"Ha! boy!" said Captain Jat, and hove his spade down. "That's the dead spit of the one I got from the Portygee."

He crushed it under his heel, for it was too fouled with the verdigris to be opened easily. When he had burst it in this way, he raked out a piece of dirty sheepskin, and had it spread flat open in a moment. Then he began to swear; and, for his ease, he knocked Pibby Tawles, the boy, over upon the rock, and kicked him a dozen times, before the lad got away from him.

Afterwards, he hove the sheepskin in the boy's face, all crumpled; and danced then all about the rock, blaspheming. He kicked the two spades, clattering enormously, one after the other, right across the hole; then he caught hold of the bag and hove it after them; and immediately came to clout the boy again; but Pibby Tawles out with one of his pistols, and he stopped at that, and burst into a sort of low laughing, reaching into the skirts of his great coat, the while. He fetched out a big flask of rum toddy, and pulled the cork with his teeth; and after that, he just squatted down, and lighted his pipe and sat drinking and smoking, with his back to the boy . . . muttering away to himself, and seeming regardless of any danger that the noise of his antics might have been likely to bring down upon them.

As for Pibby Tawles, after listening and peering round into the gloom for a little while, he took advantage of his Master's mood, which he had seen something of before, when that wry-natured man had been much put out. He reached cautiously for the crumpled piece of parchment, and crawled over

Digitized by Google

quietly to the lantern; though he need not have bothered to go easy; for Captain Jat's sullen mood, at the moment, was such that he would hear or heed nothing; but only persist in his smoking and drinking.

When Pibby Tawles was come near to where the lantern stood upon the rock, a little to the rearward side of his Master, he spread out the parchment gently upon the rock, staring the while at the Captain to be sure that the man did not see him. Then, by the light from the lantern, the boy was able to discover why the Captain had been so put out; for on the old sheepskin there were just these words, which he was able to spell out slowly:—

THE EARLY BIRD HATH
CATCHED THE WORM.
THOU FOOL

And then, as Pibby stared at this, all mixed between grinning, and some disappointment because he had hoped to have some gain out of anything they might have discovered, he turned the sheepskin about, and found two bits of a clumsy scrawl on the back, that had at first no meaning for him.

Suddenly, however, as he stared at these, he got a sharp idea, and held the skin up towards the lantern, with the plain-written side towards him. Pibby Tawles nearly shouted then, to see what he had found; for the two clumsy scrawls upon the other side of the parchment, resolved themselves into the words "NOT" and "LOWER"; being obviously written backwards upon the back of the parchment, so that from the front, and seen against the light,

Digitized by Google

they would read in with the quaint insult upon the front, entirely changing its meaning, thus:—

THE EARLY BIRD HATH
Not CATCHED THE WORM.
Lower THOU FOOL

Pibby Tawles looked quickly towards his Master's broad, muscular back; but the Captain was still smoking . . . chunnering away to himself over his pipe, in a way that showed the peculiar Vinegar of his particular Personality at work in his twisted mental arteries. From time to time, he would swig heavily at the flask of rum-toddy, and immediately again to his pipe-sucking and chunnering, hunching his shoulders in a grotesque fashion, and breaking out from time to time in little snarls.

The boy stared long enough at his Master to be sure that he was not feigning unconsciousness of what was happening behind his back; for Pibby had been long enough now with Captain Jat to learn that the Captain was quite uncannily "aware" in certain of his moods; as though, at odd times, some primeval, half-faun instinct waked him to a hyper-awaredness of matters around.

But this was plainly one of the Captain's obtuse hours; and Pibby slid the parchment cautiously into the breast of his shirt, and began to move back quietly again to the hole they had uncovered. He reached it, and thrust one dirty, vigorous hand down into the fine sandy earth that filled it. He worked his hand, burrowing eagerly and fiercely, and all the time, he stared at his Master's back.

Digitized by Google

Suddenly, the boy checked a gasp of amazed half-incredulous excitement; for his burrowing hand had reached down to a hard mass, that shifted under his working fingers, and resolved into countless disks, that he fumbled for and grabbed at feverishly; and so withdrew his hand, full of dry sand and dull yellow coins that glimmered oddly in the vague light from the lantern.

"Gee!" he whispered. "Gee!" And stared at the Captain's back; but Captain Jat was obviously unaware.

Pibby whipped off his neckcloth, and put the handful of sand and gold into it; then, thrusting his hand again down the hole, burrowed fiercely. He raked out three good fistfuls of gold coins and sand, and put them into the neckcloth gently so that they would not chink; and all the time as he worked so silently, he watched each movement of the Captain's back.

Abruptly, Captain Jat raised his head, listening; but still with his back turned to the boy. Pibby ceased to burrow, on the instant, and gathered the neckcloth noiselessly together, the sand among the coins preventing them from chinking. He knotted the whole swiftly into a tight ball, and shoved it inside his shirt, along with the parchment. Then, with a quick movement, he smoothed over the sand within the hole. And not for one moment during these brief actions did he cease to watch his Master.

The Captain continued his listening attitude; and Pibby Tawles began, himself, to listen; for it was plain to him that Captain Jat was not paying attention to any vague movement of his; but waiting for

Digitized by Google

a repetition of some far sound that he must have fancied he heard out in the night.

"Hark! Boy!" said the Captain, sharply; and hove himself round upon his seat, with a single quick jerk. "That's twice this blessed minute I've heard it. Hark!"

They crouched there, listening; with the lantern casting their shadows oddly across the silence of the rocks; and the noise of the fall seeming to come to them with an almost unnatural clearness through the night about. Once, as Pibby shifted his attitude slightly, he thought he heard the faint chink of the money inside his shirt; but this was, possibly, no more than what I might term a conscience-sound; for Captain Jat's keen ears seemed to have heard nothing.

And then, long-drawn and horrible, away in the night, Pibby heard the sound that had come to them before, in the great wood-belt.

It came again . . . a curious, big, clamour of sound, floating oddly in the night; and, for the second time, the vague, yet frightening, familiarity of it stirred the boy's memory oddly.

He had faced round towards it, and, without knowing, had drawn a pistol in each hand. The sudden indefinable terror that the sound brought to him had driven out the gold-lust; had driven out even all memory of the gold; for he had a feeling that a very real danger was roaming out there in the vagueness of the night.

He looked swiftly over his shoulder at the immovable, listening, tense, humped shape of his Master. "What is it, Cap'n?" he asked, in a low voice; with

Digitized by Google

the feeling that Captain Jat *must* know. And then, even as he ventured the question, the abominable, unnaturally familiar clamour broke out again, unmistakeably nearer.

Captain Jat gave out a sudden, fierce grunt of comprehension:—

"Iils!" he said aloud, in a curious voice. "Iils! Sacred dogs, boy! They feeds 'em on the sacrifices, till they won't eat ought else. I heard about 'em once, further up this same coast. The priests sometimes lets 'em go loose at night. That's why them niggers was carryin' torch-lights, so as to frighten 'em off. They'm feared of light, same as wild beasts. . . ."

He broke off, and snatched up the lantern. Then ran towards the water, and looked down, holding the lantern low. "I guess that's why yon Portygee was so cocksure I'd not handle yon gold, when he gave me yon chart," Pibby, who had followed at a run, heard him grumbling to himself. "He grinned middlin' rum-like at me; may the devil bust him!"

The curious, tremendous clamour of sound broke out now in the woods to their back; seeming to be very near. And at the sudden noise, Captain Jat swore, and hove the lantern into the water; so that they were instantly in darkness.

"Curse them!" he muttered, with an almost incredible savagery. "They'm here a'ready! Into the water, boy; smart now! There's dozens of 'em, by the noise of 'em! An' they'm near big as donkeys, with the way they feeds 'em!"

He caught Pibby swiftly by the shoulders, and swung him down through the darkness into the rush

Digitized by Google

of the brook; then, with a spring like a great lean cat, he landed beside him, driving the water in all directions.

Above them, from the direction of the wood, the infernal noise burst out again, near and tremendous; and Captain Jat swore and dashed ahead through the dark, following the course of the shallow stream. Pibby kept close behind, stumbling, splashing and panting; for to his short figure, the water proved an immensely greater obstacle than to the unusually long, lean legs of his Master; who was seldom immersed above his great, bony knees.

Once, Captain Jat whipped round upon the lad, fiercely:—

"Make less your noise, boy!" he growled, stooping down almost to the level of Pibby's face. "If them Iils gets us, I'll sure clump you silly!"

Then he led on again.

Away up the stream, they heard now the clamour of the great dogs, making a threatening, broken din. By the sound of them, they had evidently come clear out from the trees, and were hunting the "scent" of the man and the boy, to and fro across the rocky plateau.

Meanwhile, the man and the boy ran on, down stream, through the darkness; the boy fighting desperately to keep up with the tremendous stride of his Master. Once, Pibby lost his footing altogether on a slippery stone, and butted headlong into the stern of Captain Jat, bringing the whole lean, vigorous length of the Captain down on top of him, with the result that Pibby Tawles was sadly bruised, and, further, half drowned during the time that the

Digitized by Google

long man sat upon the unfortunate and submerged youth, and cursed aloud into the night. And, as soon as Pibby struggled, sobbing for breath, to his feet, the Captain promptly knocked him down again, with a swinging clout; and began then immediately to go down stream once more; his anger seemingly appeased.

Now, whether it was that the horde of dogs astern of them, had scent of them through the night air, or whether it was that the Captain's cursings had been too vehement for personal safety, it is impossible to say. All that is certain is that there came suddenly a fresh note into the crying of the dogs; and immediately a silence; and then, as the man and the boy paused instinctively to listen, they heard, clear and unmistakeable in the distance, the scrambling rush of padded feet coming along the bank towards them.

"They'm sure got us, boy! I told ye I'd clout you proper if they did!" said Captain Jat, and made a heavy blow at Pibby Tawles, with his open fist; but the boy dodged, and kicked his Master savagely on the knee, whereat Captain Jat swore horribly, and hopped about the bottom of the brook on one foot. He slipped, and sat down with an enormous splash, and immediately began to roar with laughter, in a great voice, that could have been heard half a mile away in that sudden, threatening silence; for the only other sound was the horrid noise of the running feet, padding along the bank.

"We'll never see daylight again, boy," said Captain Jat, in an almost cheerful voice. And, without troubling to rise from where he sat in the rush of the water, he loosed off with one of his big pistols

Digitized by Google

at something that dashed past, along the bank. "They'm here, boy! Shoot all you can, 'fore they has us!" he shouted, as he pulled the trigger.

But there was no explosion; for the priming had been wet. He cursed Pibby afresh; cursed the brook, the weapons, the powder, the dogs, and his Creator.

Meanwhile, Pibby had tried his own weapons, and found them temporarily useless.

And then, all the dark bank opposite became alive with vague, rustling, racing creatures, indifferently seen against the background of the gloomy woods beyond. There rose a deafening, hoarse, dreadful baying, gargantuan and horrible; and in the same instant the smell of the great, flesh-gorged beasts came to them. There was a sudden splash, and Pibby saw something that looked like the shadow of a huge dog, in the water. Then Captain Jat was upon it, striking with his big knife; though Pibby could only guess that he was using his knife.

Pibby saw the Captain leap away from the dog in the water, and dash straight at the high, overhanging bank. The dogs above howled with bestial expectancy. Then, to his amazement, he saw a shower of sparks; and realised that his Master was striking his flint and steel into the great tussocks of the dried grass. But he could not guess that Captain Jat had half emptied his powder-flask quickly there among the grass.

The dogs had seemed to give back, at the showers of sparks; as though afraid of the least vestige of fire. But now they made a sudden rush. And even as they rushed, the sparks fired the powder; for a

Digitized by Google

vast burst of flame came out of the dry grass, that sent Captain Jat staggering back, with his beard all blazing.

But it was not at the Captain that Pibby Tawles looked. In the light of that great flame, he had seen maybe a score of dogs, so enormous in size that their bodies appeared to be as large as the bodies of young donkeys. Their colour was a dirty, unhealthy white, and they were hideously blotched with great sores, while their eyes showed scummy and brutishly inert in the light.

The pack of dogs had stiffened back instantly from the great blaze; and, as the fire caught the grass around, and sent up fresh spurts of flame, they gave back farther, in a curiously helpless fashion, whimpering peculiarly. Pibby Tawles saw now that the flames were flickering through the dry grass and bracken in every direction upon that side of the brook; and the dogs began to run sideways towards the wood beyond, whining as they ran.

Abruptly, the boy saw something extraordinary; for among the hinder dogs, there ran on all fours with the dogs, certain creatures that whined and snarled like dogs, yet certainly were not dogs.

The boy had climbed out of the water, on to the other bank, and had a clear view; and, suddenly, he realised that the creatures that ran with the dogs, were men, running with incredible swiftness upon all fours . . . not upon their hands and knees, but upon their hands and toes. They were covered from their heads to their feet with what appeared to be great dog-skins.

"Priests, boy!" he heard Captain Jat say,

Digitized by Google

suddenly, at his elbow; for the Captain had climbed up now beside him. "They'm worse nor any of them Iils, boy; if what I've heard is truth. They hunts with them at nights, sometimes, like this, so they told me down the coast; an' now I see 'tis true. An' they'm as mortial feared of light as the dogs. No use has they for flesh-meat, 'cept it be human meat, I've heard; an' well I believe it now!"

In his angry disgust, Captain Jat raised one of his pistols, and snapped it off in the direction in which the dogs and the men-brutes had disappeared. He had changed the priming, whilst he was speaking, and the report echoed dully against the hoarse roar of the fire upon the far side of the brook; but whether the Captain hit anything, or not, Pibby Tawles could not be sure; though he thought he heard a distant, half-human howling.

"Change your primin', boy," said his Master; and busied himself in re-loading his discharged pistol, and replacing the primings of the others. When this was done, Captain Jat led off at a good pace down stream; a pistol in each hand, and his eyes busy with every clumping of bush, or tussock of the great silver-grass they came near; for they were soon out of the strong light from the fire, which spread no very great way, on account of the rocky nature of the ground, which broke the clumpings of bush and tall grass into odd groups, and so prevented the fire from gaining to the forest beyond.

Presently, in maybe near an hour, the Captain and Pibby were gone sufficiently far from the fire for it to show no more than a dull, red glow against the night-sky to their rear; and all about them had come

Digitized by Google

again the utter and dree silence of the huge, timber-grown slopes of the great headland.

"Quiet, boy!" Captain Jat growled, presently, as Pibby fouled a great root with his foot, and stumbled. A few minutes later, he stopped short in his swift, stealthy walk, and reached his hand back against the boy's chest. "Ssst!" he said. "They'm followin'. They've crost, an' they'm smellin' us out. Hark!"

For a little time of silence the two of them stood without movement; then, abruptly, far away in the forest to their backs, there rose again that strange, clamouring, half familiar, utterly horrible, and, in some peculiar fashion, unnatural.

"That's them priest swine!" said Captain Jat, grimly. "It's them that makes the funny sound to the dogs' howlin'. It's up hellum now, boy, an' run for all we're worth, or you won't never see daylight in this world again. An' don't you make a sound, or I'll clout you good an' hearty!"

Captain Jat turned, and went down among the trees at a great pace. They had left the nearness of the brook some time back; and they went downward now, blindly; yet knowing that by so doing they must eventually reach the sea-shore. From time to time, as they ran, there came the ugly clamour, away among the far darknesses of the wood to their rear; and the trees around would catch the sound, and throw it at them, uncomfortably, from half a dozen directions in the night. And all the while, that cry of bestial hunger was steadily nearing them.

Abruptly, as they raced downward, Pibby missed his footing, and went headlong; the pistol he carried

Digitized by Google

in his hand, exploding with a great thud of sound, in the heavy silence among the trees. The bullet flicked between Captain Jat's legs, skinning one of his knees, and that wrathful length of man turned, cursing at the top of his voice, and clouted Pibby fiercely, right and left, as he rose.

"You damned cork-fender!" he roared. "Stay an' be eat by them devils astern!"

And with that, he turned, and continued his great stride downward through the darkness; avoiding the trees, almost as though he had some power of seeing in the dark.

Pibby got to his feet again, and followed the Captain; though his head was singing dizzily with the clumping he had received, as well as with the force of his tumble. Yet, he ran on desperately, managing to keep within sound of the Captain's footsteps, and slowly overhauling him; for to be left behind was to be caught by those incredible brutes in his rear.

In this fashion, they continued, and at the verge of the wood, the boy overhauled Captain Jat; but he was so breathless, and so shaken by striking himself against the tree trunks in the darkness, that he ran, gasping madly for breath, his legs numb and heavy and almost useless. It was then that Captain Jat did, for him, a surprisingly nice thing; for there broke out now a tremendous clamour of the pursuing dogs and men-beasts, seeming no more than a hundred fathoms, or so, within the wood; and at the horrid sound, Captain Jat let out a brutal oath, and muttering:—"Cub-dunnage!" picked up the blown lad, as though he had been but a kitten, and raced away with him at an amazing pace along the beach;

THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES OF GEORGIA

Digitized by Google

his great legs seeming to cover a full fathom at every stride.

Astern of them, the clamour rose now, fierce and threatening, and so clear, that it was plain the brutes had broken free out of the wood, and were stretching after them along the open shore. At that, the Captain pushed the lad higher in his arms:—

"Over my shoulder, boy!" he grunted. "Fire over my shoulder. Backen the brutes, if you can, boy, or we're sure gone!"

Pibby Tawles stared along the dark sands, and again came the clamour, very near, and sharp above the constant, wholesome noise of the sea all along upon his right. Then the boy saw something, many things, vague and black to their rear, that moved swiftly after them. He was, as you know, an extraordinary shot with a pistol, and he loosed off over the Captain's shoulder, nearly deafening his Master; and a fierce howl out of the semi-darkness told that his shot had hit. Time after time, he fired, and three more of his shots brought maddened yelps out of the gloom along the beach. Then he reached his hand down to Captain Jat's belt, and drew one of the Captain's pistols; for he had fired all his own. With this, he loosed off again; and there came a half-human crying, that was very horrible; and immediately the boy was aware that the pursuit had ceased.

From their rear, there rose now a fierce, bestial snarling, and all the time a terrible voice shrieked and shrieked, and presently died away into a dreadful silence.

"You've hit one of them priest fellers!" grunted the Captain, breathlessly. "An' I guess them Iils

Digitized by Google

has just turned an' eat the swine; an' serve his sort right an' proper, too!"

Behind them, there rose afresh the sudden uproar of the horrid chase; which told the two of them that the brutes astern had finished their dreadful meal, and were speeding once more towards them, through the darkness.

"Put me down, Cap'n!" said Pibby. "I can run all right now!"

Captain Jat said nothing; but opened his arms, and hove the boy from him, as though he had been no more than a bundle. Pibby struck the sand with a thud that sickened him; but was on his feet in an instant, and racing behind his master; whilst less than a hundred fathoms in his rear, there rose the constant, incredible clamour of the great Iils and the brute-men that hunted with them.

"The boat!" said the Captain, a moment later, and spurted forward. As he did so, he must have trodden on one of the large round stones that strewed the sands here and there; for he slid, and pitched forward with a tremendous thud on to his face. And there he lay, as still as though he had been killed.

"Get up, Cap'n!" shouted Pibby Tawles, and jumped to him and hove at his great, bony shoulders. "Get up, Cap'n!" But Captain Jat sagged inert upon the sand; for the sudden fall had knocked the senses out of him.

Behind them, the noise of the brutes swept infernally towards them through the night; and Pibby could already hear the patter of many feet, and the sharp rattle of odd stones, sent flying by the pads of the great dogs. He caught the Captain by one shoulder

Digitized by Google

and arm, and hove him round upon his back, so that he could get at his undischarged pistols. Then, swiftly but deliberately, the boy fired barrel after barrel along the sands, holding the heavy weapons no more than a foot above the level of the shore.

With each thudding bang of the big pistols, there came ferocious yelps of pain; and then, twice in succession, a wild half-human yelling answered his shots, and the clamour of the dogs turned suddenly once more into that terrible snarling note, out of which came scream after scream, which told what was happening again.

Pibby Tawles turned then upon the Captain and slapped the big man's face savagely with his open hand. A dozen times, he struck him; and suddenly Captain Jat began to swear thickly, and then turned and sat up, blaspheming insanely.

"Get up, Cap'n! Get up, Cap'n!" said Pibby. "They'll come after us again in a tick!"

He got the man to his feet, and reeled with him towards where the boat lay, not more than a dozen paces away. They reached it, threw off the painter, and pushed madly, and so had it quickly afloat. As the boat took the water, there arose again the roar of the brutes, coming towards them; and the two had scarcely got into the boat, and begun to push out from the shore with their oars, when the great dogs were dashing into the shallow water all about them.

Captain Jat swung his oar round by the handle, and struck in among the dogs, and as he struck, Pibby crouched below the sweep of the great ash oar, and pushed steadily with his own against the sea bottom,

Digitized by Google

and so, in a few moments, the boat began to move out into deep water.

Yet, even in that brief time, one of the great dogs had leapt and crooked its great forelegs in-board over the gunnel of the boat, and was scrambling furiously to climb in over; but Captain Jat beat in its head with the end of his oar, and the huge, foul-smelling beast fell back into the water.

A minute afterwards, they had the boat clear of danger, heading away out to the open sea, beyond the lee of the Headland; while astern of them, there rose the incessant, horrid clamour of the great dogs, and blending with it, a noise that was infinitely more dreadful —the disgusting, human-bestial note of men-beasts that hunted with the dogs.

An hour later, the two were safely aboard; and Pibby was stowing away into his sea-chest, with infinite satisfaction, a full hundred and fifty gold pieces, out of the knotted neckerchief that he had hidden in his shirt. Then, a sudden, unusual twinge of conscience troubled him; for he remembered how Captain Jat had carried him. He thought awhile, and presently reached down to the stored gold. After which, he went into the cabin and told Captain Jat that he believed they had discovered the position of the treasure, after all.

In support of his statement, he planked down, upon the cabin table, one of the gold pieces, and explained how he had discovered it, whilst rooting among the sand in the hole.

"Boy," said Captain Jat, solemnly, over the top of his fourth pewter of rum-toddy, "we'll ashore again yon next v'yage an' find yon treasure; aye! if so

Digitized by Google

there's ten thousand of them damned Iils. But it won't be no manner of use now; for the whole place'll be riotin' for a month to come."

"'i, 'i, Cap'n," agreed Pibby, and boldly ventured his cup into the toddy, a second time; for the Captain had invited him to bring his cup and join him, whilst he told his yarn. But, for his pains, Captan Jat caught him by the scruff, and poured the good liquor down his back, inside his shirt.

Which, after all, proved a very effective salve to Pibby Tawles' suddenly troublesome conscience; for Pibby went back into his cabin, and, without bothering to change his shirt, turned-in and slept with the utmost vigour and satisfaction. You will remember that he had omitted all mention of the hundred and forty nine remaining pieces of gold, which lay so snug in the bottom of his sea-chest!

As I have remarked before, Pibby Tawles was undoubtedly a youth with a sound eye to the main chance.

Digitized by Google

THE GETTING EVEN OF "PARSON" GUYLES

CHAPTER I

"Is Mr. Magee in?" shouted a burly, thick-necked, very self-assured looking man.

The self-assured looking man rapped heavily with his stick on the counter of the small book shop, as he shouted; and at the same moment a door opened noiselessly, away among the shadows, at the back of the shop.

A lean, grim face, with clean-shaven mouth, and wearing a grey goatee, Dundrearys and blue glasses, stared out from the shadows.

"Is Mr. Magee in, confound your rotten business ways!" shouted the burly man. And beat angrily again upon the counter.

The man who owned the grim, clean-shaven mouth, came forward, with a curiously noiseless step, out of the darkness that lay in the back portion of the long, narrow shop.

"I'm Mr. Magee," he said, quietly. "Ye'll kindly stop that sort of noise in my shop."

"My time's money," said the stout man. "I can't wait all day in a hole like this, while you play

Digitized by Google

dominoes in the back parlour. I don't wonder your business is rotten. Your methods are rotten. And I consider the offer I have to make you is far above the mark. I'm the agent for Mr. James Henshaw. I've been instructed to offer you £50 for your business, and your stock at valuation. If you like to take £100 down and clear out this week-end, I'll give you a cheque now, and you can sign this agreement."

The stout Agent drew a foolscap envelope from his pocket; but Mr. Andrew Magee intervened.

"The door, Sir," he said, quietly, "is to your left. I'll thank you to be going now."

"You mean," said the Agent, "that you'll fight, like a lot of other silly fools have tried to do. You know what that'll mean; we are opening a thirty yard frontage right next door to this hole of yours. Your potty business'll be dead in a fortnight. It's a present I'm offering you; that's what it is."

Mr. Andrew Magee came round the counter. He was tall, and had a lean, hard figure. He touched the other man on the elbow.

"The door, Sir," he remarked, gently, "is to your left——"

"Be damned to you and your door!" roared the Agent. "You smug, ignorant, unbusinesslike fool. Take my offer, or out of this hole we'll have you in a couple of weeks."

"I allow no man to call me that, Sir," said Mr. Andrew Magee, as he hit the Agent hard and solid on the side of the jaw. "That's not to give you the dope," he said; "but to teach you to mend your manners. Out of my shop!"

The last four words came with a queer metallic-

Digitized by Google

sounding rip of cold passion, that somehow fitted well the grimness of face and figure of Mr. Magee. And the Agent stayed for no further argument. He rose, staggering; gripped the side of his fleshy jaw, and ran wordless out of the shop.

"Damn a' bloodsuckers an' them as useth their power to oppress!" said Mr. Magee, solemnly, as he stood by the counter. "Am I never to live honest, or must the sins of my youth wither always the chances of my age?"

Such phrases as these may be better understood when we realise that Mr. Andrew Magee's proper name was Andrew McGuyles, and that in his young manhood he had been a Presbyterian minister, and had never, despite his deviations from the "narrow path," ceased to have a deep feeling for all matters of religion. Many a time, had he fought to gain back to an honest life, and each time he had fallen, either when his own particular "devil" entered him, or because, as now threatened, the Fates were minded to deal him one more unkindly clout of misfortune.

"Professionally," Mr. Andrew Magee, or McGuyles, was known always as either "The Parson" or "Parson" Guyles. The title was a respected one on both sides of the water; for a cleverer safe-blower (*i.e.*, safe-breaker) there had never been in either country.

CHAPTER II

The Agent was quite right, in the main, when he said they would run the "Parson" out of his shop, in quick time.

Digitized by Google

The Agent, and Millionaire James Henshaw (who had made his first money by curious methods on the other side, and was now increasing it by methods equally undesirable) had a few words about the dour Scotsman, whose premises they wished to annex.

"Yes," said Millionaire Henshaw, when the Agent had told his story. "Run him out. Make an example of him, by all means. We can't let that sort of thing pass. We've got to put the fear of God into them, and then buy 'em out at skim-milk prices."

Parson Guyles did not get even a "skim-milk" price. He was ruined utterly within three months, by being totally undersold, until he did not have half a dozen customers into his little dark shop in a day.

The hour in which he put his shutters up for the last time over the little window, would have been a bad time for the Millionaire or his Agent to have met him. However, he had a little money saved, and he disappeared quietly, having paid all his debts; for Parson Guyles, when he was living honestly, lived honestly, because of the grim Puritan blood that was in him.

CHAPTER III

When Parson Guyles at any time ceased to be found at any address known to the Profession, it was generally concluded among his expert friends that "the Parson was on the honest lay again," and no attempt would be made to discover his whereabouts, until he chose to re-discover himself. Perhaps this consideration for what many of them must have regarded as nothing more than a recurrent peculiarity

Digitized by Google

of the Parson's, may have been partly prompted by the complete and efficient unpleasantness that followed upon any intrusion, by his expert acquaintances, into what might be termed his "hours of honesty."

But now, three months after he had put up the shutters in the little book shop, the Parson appeared once more among people who knew and appreciated him for his record of "work accomplished"; and because of this, accorded him a welcome, that had in it a respect that rose above any criticism of his peculiar instincts for, and lapses into, what our spiritual advisers term the Narrow Path.

During the months which lay between the closing of the little shop and Parson Guyles' re-appearance, he must have put in a great deal of professional work, in the way of expert Inspection of Premises; for when he convened a meeting of three (John Vardon, engineer; Sandy Mech, expert "spade and shovel" man, and himself) the proposition he had to lay before the meeting, backed up by the very exact and appropriate information that he had to offer on all needful or disputable points, produced amazing, though professionally subdued, enthusiasm.

"You are sure the limit of Eternal Wonder, Parson," said Sandy Mech. "Count me and J. V. in to the last snuffing. I reckon the Almighty——"

"We'll ha' na talk of the A'michty," interrupted Parson Guyles, sternly. "There's just John Vardon and you and me an' the De'il in this; not to mention yon Millionaire hog. The A'michty, I pray, will no interfere, an' that's as much as ma conscience can hope."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

"This is going to be a longish job, ye'll understan'," said the Parson, as they stood, together, in the cellar of a house across the street from the big Emporium, which had extended until all vestige of the shop of one, Andrew Magee, had vanished.

There were a number of interesting parcels stacked up on the cellar floor, and John Vardon proceeded to unpack one of the longer packages.

John Vardon had been, as lately as the past year, a highly respected Consulting Engineer; but was now discredited, owing to his connection with that unpleasant little affair of the Go-a-gath mines in West California. He unpacked the parcel and produced the component parts of a folding table, which he proceeded to erect. There followed further unpackings, which produced several instruments of a design familiar to mining engineers. He effected what I might term a conjunction of parts, and began to adjust the instruments.

Meanwhile, the Parson had lit up a distinctly spirited "glow" lamp, by tapping the main wire, with a confidence that would have appalled a municipal expert, and a skill that would have bewildered the head Practical Electrician of a private wiring firm.

Then the Parson and Sandy Mech began to unpack and lay out the contents of the other parcels; and while Sandy Mech gloated over ingenious little digging tools, that possessed surprising little nickel connections for electrical wiring, the Parson pored, with a grimmer appreciation, over sundries of a kind

Digitized by Google

unknown outside of his own craft, and to few even who were of it.

John Vardon was busy now with a tracing of a municipal street-plan, the obtaining of which had been due to night work on the part of the Parson.

The rent of the basement in which the cellar was situated, had cost the Parson no less than £30 of his hardly saved money; this sum being three months' "advance," demanded by the City, Land and Estate agents, in the usual course.

It was impossible to occupy the basement, without some sufficient business pretext to prevent suspicions; and the Parson boldly made use of his old trade name of Andrew Magee, Bookseller, which he had painted along the "sunk" windows, in black, backed in by a light cream, which would not keep out too much daylight; yet rendered the whole premises safe from the prying of any over-curious persons.

He was able without difficulty to obtain sufficient stock on credit, owing to his having paid all his previous bills; though now, being on other Paths than those of honesty, he had not the least intention of paying.

In this way, he was able to cover securely all doubtful signs; for it was merely apparent that Andrew Magee had obtained financial backing somehow, and returned to do further battle with the huge Emporium of all stores (including books and stationery), opposite. And this, after all, is a perfectly correct description of his intention!

The tunnel under the road was commenced that night, the walls of the cellar being pierced after about two hours' work. There followed six feet of soil, and

Digitized by Google

then eight feet of earth packed so hard that it was like some patent composition.

Four days, and the early portion of each night, they excavated, with Sandy Mech very earthy and damp and in his element, as he handled his pet midget drills. They did not work after the streets became still, lest the vibration of their machine should be conveyed through the earth, sufficiently to become apparent to any constable or passer-by. Moreover, the work was going forward at a speed that would enable them easily, unless something quite unexpected happened, to reach the strong-room by the eighteenth of the month. This was the date the Parson had fixed for entering the Millionaire's new strong-room, which was of the latest model, and had been elaborately and incorrectly described at great length in a score of popular journals.

The earth from the tunnel was stored in the empty rooms of the basement, which were kept locked. The sub-underground shop was very little patronised, luckily, as the Parson observed, for the wholesale book people, and this enabled Parson Guyles frequently to slip into the cellar, where he worked at carrying out the loose earth; having fixed up a temporary electric bell to warn him if anyone entered the shop.

He found it undesirable, however, to leave the shop unattended; for one day, on hearing the bell ring, he went in, to find a big constable in uniform waiting impatiently.

"You won't get no trade here, if you keeps everybody waiting half the day like this," said the big policeman. "I want a re-fill for this pocket book.

Digitized by Google

I nearly went opposite, only I thought I'd patronise you; you had a shop t'other side, didn't you?"

"Yes," said Andrew Magee, tersely. "Here's your re-fill. Sixpence ha'penny, please."

"Why, I gets 'em for four an' a half, opposite!" said the policeman, aggrieved.

"Maybe," said the Parson. "But they're only straw-paper, and they ha' twenty-five leaves less in each book. Maybe, if you learnt to keep your eyes open, which I've a notion is your trade, you'd be a better policeman. You ha' na room to teach me my trade, I'm thinkin'!"

The policeman paid, grumbling, and went out.

"I don't want your sort in here," said Andrew Magee, to himself. "And I reckon you'll ha' no mind to come here at that price again! All the same, maybe, it was pryin' you were after; and I'll leave the shop no more in hours."

CHAPTER V

"That," said John Vardon to the Parson, on the fifth day of their work, "is the gas main." He touched with his thumb the edge of a great round of iron, that was visible through the clayey earth in the top of the tunnel. "I've run the drift straight, so the blessed main's sunk a bit. There's gravel showing here, and we'll have to line her, I'm afraid. There's been some proper municipal work in the laying of this tin pipe!"

CHAPTER VI

"I reckon we're across. I'm up against the

Digitized by Google

wall!" said Sandy Mech, coming out of the tunnel on the evening of the eleventh day.

Five hours later, they were through the wall, and within the foundation of Millionaire Henshaw's huge Emporium.

"Six yards and twenty-seven inches more, including one division wall, and we'll be up against the strong-room," said John Vardon, after a further careful series of measurements on a tracing of the builders' secret plans of the situation of the strong-room, which tracing was, like the others, also a product of the Parson's skill in eluding those mechanical difficulties, which are presumed to ensure doors remaining closed to strangers.

CHAPTER VII

"We're there," said Sandy Mech's voice, in hoarse excitement, as he came out into the cellar on the afternoon of the fifteenth day. "It's cement outside. And I s'pose there'll be that everlastin' crossed railway iron to go through. How I do hate the fool as started that idee!"

"There's worse, lad," said Parson Guyles. "This is nigh the latest, and they got Anson's net wirin', running right through the cement; and the current's on all the twenty-four hours, and it's a six-inch mesh. If we snick a single wire either way, the bells in all the Police Stations for a mile round will be ringing. How would you go through that, lad?"

"Lordy!" said Sandy Mech. "Each man to his own job, Parson. I guess you'll manage. You're a holy wonder."

Digitized by Google

"I'm a mighty sinful man," said Parson Guyles, sombrely.

CHAPTER VIII

"The wire's laid just under a skin of the cement," said the Parson, about 11 p.m. that night; for the actual work of breaching the strong-room could not be attempted in the daytime. He fingered the stark, grey surface of cement, where the tunnel ended. "It lies in a hollow, between the main wall of the room and my finger. Hark to the hollow sound of this!" And he tapped it with a small, beautifully shaped pick-hammer, no more than two ounces in weight, that shone like silver.

With swift, light strokes of marvellous judgment and skill, he picked an oblong hole clean through the outer cement-skin, which proved to be one inch thick.

"This," muttered the Parson, as he inserted an investigating finger, "is where a rash man would spoil himsel' and ha' the constables swarming round before he knew what might be wrong——" He broke off short, and stared at Sandy Mech, as if suddenly stirred by some other thought.

"I wonder now if yon fat constable had a notion of ought," he said, pondering.

"Eh?" asked Sandy Mech, startled by the mention of so unpleasing a name. "What cop?"

But Parson Guyles merely shrugged his shoulders. "Just a notion of mine, laddie," he said. He knew Sandy Mech's cautious nature too well to explain. He had never mentioned the incident to either Vardon or Mech of the constable's brief and untimely patronage. Vardon might not have troubled un-

Digitized by Google

duly; but Sandy Mech was as shy as a rabbit. Perhaps his burrowing propensities had something to do with his nervous traits.

"The K wrench," said the Parson, a few seconds later. This instrument, which was made of nickel steel, and possessed extraordinarily thin jaws, covered with gutta-percha, he slipped carefully into the hole he had picked, and proceeded to break away the shell of cement. He worked with an infinite care, that showed how great he considered the risk; and presently he had laid bare a complete network of insulated wire.

"Now," said Parson Guyles, "I'll ha' yon insulation pliers an' the coil of wire. I've a real respec' for yon Anson; for it's a pretty arrangement; but the wiring should ha' been friction-spliced, an' the splices supported in the outer skin; then it would ha' been a mighty hard thing to peel away the skin, without breakin' the circuit. But he's a smart lad, is Anson, and maybe I'll give him a point or two, that'll help him to improvements. . . . Cut me a couple dozen four-foot lengths off the coil, an' peel the ends ready, Sandy, lad."

While he talked, the Parson had been working. He had removed the insulation, for a space of several inches, from the lowest of the horizontal wires, and now he took a length of wire from Sandy Mech, and twisted the two bare copper ends firmly round the cleaned portion of the horizontal wire, about an inch apart. Then, with a pair of pliers, he cut the horizontal wire clean through, in the inch between the two twisted-on ends of the loop of wire.

"G' Lord! Parson!" said Sandy Mech, as Parson

Digitized by Google

Guyles cut the wire. "You've sure done it now!"

"Na, lad," said the Parson, "you're a good spade and shovel man; but ye're na good at this work, I'm thinkin'! Have ye no the brains to see that yon loop of wire carries the current from one cut end to the other. I've but lengthened the wire a wee, to give us room to put our sinful bodies through."

"If *you* know it's right, Parson, I'm satisfied," said Sandy, in a doubtful voice; and continued to cut lengths of wire.

Two hours later, Parson Guyles, having treated the rest of the network in similar fashion, commenced work upon the inner wall of cement.

CHAPTER IX

"For men wanting cash as we do, I reckon you'll say this is the finger of Providence, Parson," said Sandy Mech, three nights later, as he peered through the breach into the strong-room, on the night of the eighteenth.

"There's na finger of Providence about this, my lad," said Parson Guyles, who already stood within the strong-room. "That I ha' left the straight path, ye ken well; but I spread na honey! This is the finger o' the de'il; and if I hope to make a wee profit from the pointing thereof, I hope also to keep my brain clear to ken Satan when I see him!"

Sandy Mech grinned back silently at John Vardon, who was peering in over his shoulder. They were careful, in the main, not to "touch the Parson up"

Digitized by Google

on this side of him; for he was too rough a fighter to provoke unnecessarily; and on religious subjects he was easily provoked.

"There's nothing now to stop us, but the inner circuits. They've altered them since the room was first wired, as I could see by the notes on the plan margins," said the Parson. "I couldna just put my finger on the plan of the new co-ordination; and I'll ha' to be careful, laddies, or we shall touch off one of the spring connections, and there'll be half the officers in the City round this block, before you can whistle."

"I don't like that, Parson," said Sandy Mech, in a rather grim voice. "I'd a notion you said you knowed the wirings; an' . . ."

"The old wiring, Sandy," said the Parson, smiling curiously. "The *old* wiring, lad. Maybe I misled you a wee; for I had need of help to get even with mine enemy; and maybe cautious Sandy Mech might ha' held back if he'd thought it wasna all cut an' dried—eh, lad?"

"Stow it!" said Mech. "Once I sees the cash winkin' up at me like this, I don't go back, not this side chokee——"

"That's how I read you, laddie," interpolated Parson Guyles, mildly.

"All the same, Parson," went on Sandy Mech, with growing wrath, "for a religious man, you ain't careful if you speaks God's trewth, or if you lies like a blame trooper; and I don't mind tellin' you so, straight."

"You son o' the de'il——" began Parson Guyles, furiously; but John Vardon chipped in quickly.

Digitized by Google

"Drop it, for all sakes!" he said. "We're not going to mug things now by rowing like a lot of 'new pups.' Drop it, and let's get to work. I'll bet the Parson has a good notion how the new wiring is likely to be co-ordinated. He's just making you hotter than you need be!"

"You're a wise man, Vardon, in your generation," said the Parson, calming. "Put your gloves on, the two of ye, and hand me mine, and the big dividers. Then you can come in, both of you; and remember the two of ye have as much grease paint on your faces as would do for a puir de'il of an actress wench; so keep your gloves off it, or you'll smear it."

"Why ain't you made up, Parson?" asked Sandy Mech, as he began to put on a pair of good quality black kid gloves. "You need to be disguised more than me or John 'ere."

"You're a bit of a fool, Sandy, not to think before you speak; though I'm doubtin' then if ye'd ever speak at all!" said Parson Guyles, as he took his own pair from Sandy Mech. "First, ha' anyone here, or even you two ever seen my natcheral face? Don't the people round here know me as Andrew Magee! And ha' ye no' brains to see it's Andrew Magee they'll look for! Don't they know I'm the one that took on the basement we've driven the tunnel from; not to mention the officer that came in the other night, and made belief he wanted a re-fill! Lord, I wonder if he did come in honest, or to pry?"

"What!" said the two others; both startled.

The Parson explained.

"I said nothing to the two o' ye," he continued. "What was the use of givin' you the jumps when

Digitized by Google

the work had to be done. And anyway, I never notioned till to-night that he came in on the sneak; but I'm wondering now. I've got the feel in ma blood to-night that maybe yon man had designs. I'll say na mair. But if you're wantin' to go now, why I'll never stop ye."

"Now!" said both men, as one.

"Why you old——" began Sandy Mech.

"Cut it out, laddies," said Parson Guyles, cheerfully. "I'm a short tempered man, as ye ken" (the Parson grew more Scottish, as he indulged his vein). "An hour mair, if ye've the pluck o' white mice, an' ye're rich for all ye'r sinful evil lives; not but ye'll both be as poor as foolish babes a month hence. There's John Vardon now, the lusts o' the flesh, John Vardon, are the ruination of ye. The——"

"Good Lord! he's going to preach!" said Sandy Mech. "Stow it, Parson. We're with you into hell and out again. 'Ere's them dividers."

The Parson took them from him, without a word; and Sandy never knew how near he was to Eternity in that one instant; for the dividers were of steel, and heavy, and in every way adequate for so unpleasant a purpose. But John Vardon saw, and understood.

"Sandy!" he said, "shut your silly mouth. The Parson is right. We're both a pair of fools. . . . I tell you what, Parson, if I get the whack I'm looking for out of this, I'll cut the crook, and go away somewhere and live straight. I will, by the Lord, I will."

Parson Guyles' eyes gleamed with a strange and wonderful light.

Digitized by Google

"God grant it, lad," he said, with a sudden uncovering of the hidden cravings of his nature. "I wad die easier to think there had some good come out o' my sinfu' life. I haud ye to ye'r word, John Vardon, on the honour of all that you once were."

"I give you my word, Parson," said John Vardon, with perfect sincerity. "I've been a fool once; but if this comes right and we get what you think is coming to us, I'll leave England this week——"

"Not you, John!" interrupted Mech. "I've felt that way, when I first started in the perfession. It's just nerves; not funk, mind you, John; but nerves. It'll go when vou handle your share of the oof."

"Sandy Mech," said Parson Guyles, in a fierce but quiet voice, "say one word mair of your de'il's talk, an' I'll wring your neck, as Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord."

And Mech, impudent, sturdy irresponsible Sandy Mech, held his tongue; for even he knew better than to cross the Parson further in that mood. But John Vardon said nothing. He fidgeted a moment or two with his gloves; and seemed as if he might be vaguely ashamed because the better side of him had so unexpectedly answered to the bizarre cry of the "lost shepherd" (bizarre because of its very sincerity) to a lost sheep.

"Come in, both of you, an' stan' by the wall, out o' my way," said the Parson.

The strong-room was different from any that John Vardon had seen, in his brief experience of the Profession; and even Sandy Mech had never seen the same inner arrangements; for the prodigious wealth was simply and neatly packed into steel trays,

Digitized by Google

arranged along the floor in rows, with nothing between it and their hands, but the low steel-latticed covers, locked down with invisible locks to the floor.

Overhead, burned an electric light, and showed plainly the notes, bonds, or gold, as the case might be, in their respective numbered trays. It seemed to the two onlookers that they had nothing to do but burst the thin steel lattice-work with a crowbar, and fill their bags; but the Parson's casual remarks, showed just why the money was so stored, and the reasoning upon which it was considered safe:—

"Yon's a pretty arrangement," he said, as he spread out the plan of the old wiring, on the floor of the strong-room. "That's McLegg's invention—the idea of the 'meat-covers.' It's good points, as ye'll see. You'll perceive that a bank offecial can assure himself that things is right, without having to unlock aught; at the same time there can be na temptation to casual, honest-men's pickin' an' stealin', as you might say, on the part of any lesser offecials that ha' their occasional duties in here. . . . That was McLegg's way of looking at it. A countryman of mine, laddies, and clever; for the meat-covers are apt to trick the unwary. Henry Gably, a fair safe-blower too, was put away for a ten year spell only last month, through that same invention. He'd a notion to ha' the contents of the big Utrecht Bank, out Tallwar way. He got in through the roof; quieted the watchmen, an' made na bones about it, but just dynamited a breach clean through the wall o' the gold room. By the de'il's own luck, he wasna killed nor heard; but they had this same idea o' McLegg's inside the room, an' he

Digitized by Google

thought, foolish lad, he'd naught to do, but rip the meat-covers open, an' fill his bags.

"Well, before he'd ripped off the second, the officers were mobilising, as you might say, from all round the district; for you can't touch these little grids, unless ye know the co-ordination of the wiring, without ringing up the police; and that's just the tricksiness of the notion; for they tempt a man to be done wi' fine work, and just rip them open."

Parson Guyles took the long dividers, and "set" them carefully; then he placed one point of the instrument right into the angle of the West corner of the room, and drew a segment of a circle across the corner, from wall to wall, at full radius. He did the same in the East corner; then, at each place where the segments of the circles touched the walls, he pressed a sprig into the soft rubber tiling which covered the floor. From the sprigs, he stretched two thin lines, across the room, between the rows of cages; then, with his dividers, he straddled along each of the lines, making a chalk mark at each place where the points touched.

With a knife, he cut a square clean out of the rubber tiling, round each of the chalk marks. He took a case of marvellously finished tools from his pocket, also a large horseshoe-magnet. He pressed the horseshoe-magnet against the steel floor; and lifted out of its slot in the floor, a beautifully fitting "invisible" metal plate.

"I thought so," said Parson Guyles, as he examined the terminals of the wiring, which had been so cunningly hidden under the metal cover. He went round to each of the openings in the rubber,

Digitized by Google

and did the same; then he took a pair of pliers from his case, and began work upon the wiring.

"I darena cut them; for they run the main through this wiring at nights," he explained. "And the night-lights upstairs would fluff out, laddies, if I were to cut, and that would trouble the officer outside. Aye! it's a bonnie brain that thought this out."

He worked at the terminals for half an hour, crossing from opening to opening.

"I ha' small doubts but I ha' replaced the old co-ordination," he said, at last, standing up and stretching himself.

There were thirteen of the flat lattice cages on the floor of the room, and Parson Guyles pulled out his purse. He opened it, and took from it a bunch of minute slips of bright metal, curiously notched.

"I made these from rubbings of the firm's triplicates, when I took the chart-tracings," he said. "The whole thirteen keys are here. Aye! I put in a deal of labour to the success of this night's work!"

"You're a holy wonder, Parson!" said Sandy Mech, from where he stood, waiting by the wall. "Every man to his own job. I reckon Providence meant you for a safe-buster, Parson."

John Vardon nudged the enthusiastic "spade and shovel" man, to be silent; but the Parson took no bitter offence.

"The ways o' the A'michty are strange an' wonderful, Sandy," he said, with a kind of sadness in his voice. "I ha' foughten oft against my weakness; but the natcheral evil that is in me, an' the bitterness o' man in general, ha' turned my feet always into the

Digitized by Google

downward path. . . ." He paused, examining the keys thoughtfully. "But the desire to do battle wi' the evil that is in me, dies not, laddie, an' maybe one day I shall triumph, an' live the life I wad best like. Oh, aye, the life I wad best like. Aye me! . . . Now," he continued, changing suddenly, "by the old co-ordination, that I trust I ha' replaced truly, the covers can only be unlocked in the following way:—To open Number 1, I must unlock Number 10 and Number 3; then return to Number 1 and lift it open; but if I attempt to open either 10 or 3, after I've unlocked them, it sets off the alarrum; also one or two other things, that maybe I'll not tell ye now, laddies. An' a likewise reasoning applies to all."

He studied some notes in his pocket book.

"The numbers for unlocking the covers are according to the following:—

"Unlocking	10	and	3	unlocks	1.
"	1	"	7	"	2.
"	9	"	8	"	3.
"	6	"	3	"	4.
"	13	"	12	"	5.
"	13	"	2	"	6.
"	4	"	11	"	7.
"	5	"	12	"	8.
"	10	"	2	"	9.
"	12	"	11	"	10.
"	9	"	6	"	11.
"	8	"	2	"	12.
"	5	"	7	"	13.

"Now then, we'll make a test o' our de'il's luck that I could near pray the A'michty shall abide with

Digitized by Google

us this night; for then, John Vardon, you shall go free of the chains, and I shall have vengeance upon mine enemy."

He walked quietly across to the tenth cage, and inserted one of the notched slips of metal. It turned easily, without a sound.

"That's workmanship," said the Parson, with momentary professional pride. "Good work tells." He walked over to Number 3, and the key he had made for it, fitted equally well.

"Now, for the test," he said, and stepped across to Number 1.

Sandy Mech's naturally ruddy face whitened perceptibly, and John Vardon stirred uneasily, where he stood beside Mech; but only an added touch of grimness in the lines of Parson Guyles' mouth, showed that he also felt the strain of that supreme moment.

The Parson stooped and took hold of the handle of the latticed steel cover, Number 1. He lifted gently, and the cover hinged backward sweetly and noiselessly.

"God be thankit! God be thankit!" he muttered, in a subdued outburst of relief. He stood up and beckoned to where Sandy Mech and John Vardon had leant forward simultaneously from the wall. Sandy Mech's eyes burned and glowed with the true money-greed, at the sight of the uncovered thousands in coined gold, waiting only to be lifted out; but John Vardon's eyes were eager in another way. He saw there his suddenly desired freedom from the Supreme Failure that, in his morally slackened condition, he had begun to look upon as inevitably his fate. His eyes were intense with anxiety more than desire.

Digitized by Google

The Parson, on his part, had a strange mixture of triumph and a newly born anxiety in his expression; but dominating all, in that instant, was simple thankfulness and, strangely incongruous as it must seem, a subtle consciousness of holier thoughts. Abruptly, he said:—

"John Vardon, come and take the freedom I ha' to offer ye. Fetch the bags."

As Sandy Mech and John Vardon crept down the tunnel, for the bags, the Parson rapidly unlocked 1 and 7, 9 and 8, 6 and 3, 13 and 12. 13 and 12 opened a little less easily, and the Parson stood up to examine the key. He waved a hastening hand as Vardon and Mech re-appeared with four small portmanteau-like bags and a couple of grip-sacks.

"Haste ye," he said. "Maybe, out o' evil shall come good; but I misdoubt the soundness o' it. Yet the A'michty works in various ways His Wonders to pair-form—— Whist! What waur that?"

In the instant that followed, they all heard it, like a knell upon their varied hopes and longings:—the sound of an alarm gong, rattling hideously in the night; the noise coming plainly down the cleverly hidden ventilation shafts. In the same instant, there came a sudden, momentary, tremendous bluish glare of light in the room, that made the interior of the strong room brighter than any day that ever shone.

"We're done!" shouted Sandy Mech, in a positive screetch. "We're found out! Scoot!"

The Parson whipped a heavy revolver out of his pocket.

"A cool head, ma laddie, or I'll drop ye here an' now," he said calmly. "John Vardon, begin to stow

Digitized by Google

the gold in the bags. Sandy, lad, you hark to me. The police will be here, inside of ten minutes. What's gone wrong, I do not just know; but maybe I made some wee slip in the re-wiring. Now, hark ye; after the police are here, they can never come at us, save through the tunnel that no one but our three selves ken of, inside of a lang half hour. They've to bring the three separate offecials that hold the three emergency keys, that are never used except in an emergency like the present. I ha' it all worked out, down to the time it will take them to get here, even if they dress in the taxi. An' it cannot take *less* than seven and thirty minutes from this moment, before yon door is opened. By then, we shall ha' all the gold we need, an' we'll be lang gone away through the tunnel, and out by the back passage, and away in the car of our friend, John Vardon. Now, are ye quit of your panic, laddie; for I've na more time to waste on ye?"

Sandy Mech had got hold of himself, as he realised that there was not only time to achieve the gold, but that an effectual line of retreat was ready prepared; and he nodded back, rather shame-facedly, at the Parson.

"You're boss, Parson," he said. "I'm all right now."

"That's a goodish thing," said Parson Guyles. "A very goodish thing. Get packing the gold, smart now." He opened the remaining cages, with a perfectly controlled nerve.

"Surely hath mine enemy been delivered into mine hand!" he muttered; and picking up one of the grip-sacks, began to fill it rapidly with bonds.

"Nay!" he said, catching John Vardon's glance.

Digitized by Google

"Just to burn, laddie, and so to repay an eye for an eye. I will take a hand with the siller in a moment."

As each of the diminutive, strongly-built portmanteaux were filled with the solid little bags of gold coin, Parson Guyles locked and strapped them carefully, his amazing coolness acting on the others in a nerve-steadying way; so that they worked with a swiftness and method that had in it no signs of the panic, that might have been expected in three burglars who knew that, already, the police were drawing a cordon round the very building which they were robbing.

As the Parson was strapping the fourth portmanteau, there came suddenly, voices, seeming far away and muffled:—

"The door's not touched." . . . "Where are they?" . . . "Inside. . . ." "They've tunnelled in. . . ." And then a silence, during which there were several soft thuds on the door.

"Not a sound, either of ye!" whispered Parson Guyles. "Keep them guessing, laddies. Keep them guessing. The longer the better!"

". . . There's no one inside!" came one of the muffled voices. "The door's not touched; and they can't have tunnelled in, for this room's got an Anson's patent 'warning' incorporated in the walls. It's absolutely impossible to get in that way without ringing us. And it would take them a week after that to cut through."

Parson Guyles smiled, grimly, inside the room.

"The emergency keys will be here in less than half an hour," continued the voice, "and then we can get in. I expect some of the electrical gear has fused, or

Digitized by Google

something. Anyway, it's certain there's nothing to bother about."

"That's good for us!" said Parson Guyles, still in a whisper. "Now get the bags out. And never a sound, laddies. If they knew we were here, they'd be sure we'd tunnelled, and they would ha' a cordon round all the near-bye buildings, and make immediate investigation of all likely basements and cellars."

He lifted the four, enormously heavy, small portmanteaux, one after the other into the tunnel, and John Vardon and Sandy Mech began to creep with them, with infinite difficulty, along to the cellar. They found it easiest to take only one portmanteau at a time—one of them creeping on hands and knees, with the bag on his back, and the other steadying it from rolling off.

This method required four journeys to get the portmanteaux into the cellar; and then the two returned hurriedly for the grip-sacks, one of which was filled with notes and the other with bonds.

"Darn silliness! I call it," said Sandy Mech, as he crept behind John Vardon. "You can't do nothin' with bonds; nor no wise pup ever messes with notes. They're rotten dangerous."

"Drop it!" said John Vardon. "The Boss knows what he's doing. He's a wonderful man. Come on, and get it done."

"I'm with you," said Mech, honestly. "'E's a bloomin' wonder; but I never 'ad no use for paper trash."

They reached the strong-room again; and, silently, Parson Guyles passed out the two grip-sacks, stuffed with paper of incredible value.

Digitized by Google

"I'll be with ye in a moment," said the Parson. "Go ahead."

Sandy Mech led the way back along the tunnel to the cellar. He had the bigger of the two grip-sacks, which, though quite light, was difficult to handle, owing to its size and the way in which it kept catching the inequalities of the walls and roof of the narrow drift.

"Cuss the thing! Cuss it! Cuss it!" he exclaimed, suddenly, as the sack caught for the tenth time on a snag in the roof.

John Vardon raised his head, as he crept some feet behind Mech, to see what was wrong. He had lit the tunnel in three places with incandescent lights, that made it tolerably bright. He saw something that made him sicken; for the roof, only partly and hastily lined, was sagging perceptibly, and Sandy Mech's sack was caught by some protruding fragment of the down-sagging roof.

"Stop, Sandy!" he said, in a hoarse voice. "Stop!"

But even as he spoke, Sandy Mech lurched forward once more, dragging at his sack, and swearing. As he did so, there was a curious rending sound, as the lining-boards gave way, and then a low roar, as something like a ton of earth poured down into a tunnel, a little behind Sandy, cutting him off completely from John Vardon and the Parson.

John Vardon gasped, in an impenetrable smother of dust, and then backed rapidly, still carrying his grip-sack. His stern met the Parson's head solidly, as he backed through the opening into the strong-room.

Digitized by Google

"What the de'il's wrong?" whispered the Parson, somewhat warmly. "What the de'il——"

"The roof's fallen in, Parson," said John Vardon, husky with the dust, and the terror of the situation. "We're trapped. It's jail for us; just when I thought to win clear of all and start fresh. My goodness, Parson, we can't clear the drift in the time we've got."

"Well, laddie," said Parson Guyles, with peculiar earnestness, and growing more Scottish, "I ha' always had ma doots that good should come out o' evil; but the A'michty works in His ain way; and maybe He's but lessoning ye a bit mair, to show ye the hard and bitter path that is the lot o' the evil doer. Let us away in, an' see how the tunnel looks. The A'michty loveth a man that's na ower ready to cry 'Lord I'm beat!' He's a sight more patience wi' the weak-minded than wi' the weak-hearted. . . . I'm feared though, that yon Sandy will fall to the temptation o' the opportunity, an' to his lack o' courage, an' run off. An' the diggin'-tools is a' in the cellar, I'm thinkin'! Whist! Hark!"

The two men stood silent, John Vardon white and dust-smothered; but Parson Guyles calm, with bright, alert eyes.

"Here's the manager, with one of the emergency keys," one of the muffled-sounding voices was saying. "If the other two buck up, we shall have the door open in a few minutes."

John Vardon quivered, and stared round the steel room, madly.

"Steady, my lad! Steady!" said Parson Guyles. "We are not beat yet. Never ha' I, by the mercy of the A'michty, seen the inside o' jail yet; and never

Digitized by Google

will I, while the life goes in and out between ma breast banes. . . . To work, laddie!"

He thrust himself into the low mouth of the tunnel, and John Vardon followed, desperately. They came quickly to the place where the roof had collapsed, and the Parson threw himself at the loose bank of earth in which the tunnel vanished.

"Something to shovel with?" he said. "The tools are all in the cellar. . . . Ha! thanks be, I ha' the notion. To the side, man, smartly, while I go by you."

He crept quickly past the half stupefied engineer, and so into the strong-room. In a few seconds, he was back again, carrying something.

"Here ye are, laddie. Dig now, like man never dug, or ye'll dig soon at Portland."

He had brought two of the strong metal trays, in which the gold had been stored; and excellent make-shift shovels they proved. Vardon seized his, and, side by side, the two men worked like maniacs, send-the earth back between their knees in savage showers, and so filling the low drift with dust that they were almost blinded.

For some ten minutes, they worked; and then John Vardon gasped out:—

"Go back, Parson, a moment, and see if either of the other keys has come yet. I shall break up if I go on like this, feeling that they'll open that door, and be on us any moment."

The Parson merely grunted assent; he was too breathless, and too choked with the earth-dust, to speak. But if he were going to get the best out of Vardon, right to the last bitter moment, he must

Digitized by Google

ease the nerve strain from him as much as possible.

He crept rapidly into the strong-room; and there, as he stood breathing heavily, he heard a confused chorus of greeting; and then one of the muffled-sounding voices say:—

"Thank goodness! There's only the third key to come now."

There was not a moment to lose, and the Parson dived head-foremost into the tunnel again.

"God forgie me!" he muttered, "but the laddie'll drop work the instant, if I tell him the truth."

He reached Vardon, through the blinding showers of earth which the engineer was heaving back between his knees. As he came alongside of him, he inadvertently gripped the man's ankle, and Vardon whirled round on him, with a sick curse of fear.

"Whist, laddie! Whist!" said the Parson. "It is I. The second key's no arrived yet; and they've had a telephone message, saying the third man can no come for twenty minutes mair!"

"Thank God! Thank God!" said John Vardon. "I can work now." And work he did; and the Parson beside him. But Parson Guyles worked all the time with an ear cocked down the drift, knowing full well that any minute there might arrive the third key; for the minimum time that he had calculated out for the keys to arrive, was already reached. And then there would come the opening of the door, and they would be caught, literally like human rats.

The minutes passed, like eternities, and suddenly the Parson could bear it no longer.

"I'll away back," he muttered, with breathless

Digitized by Google

huskiness, "an' see if yon second key's arrived yet."

As he crept out into the clearer air of the strong-room, he heard one of the muffled voices say, in a tone of authority:—"We are all here, gentlemen. Produce each your emergency key, and insert in the electrical combination to the right of the dial, in the order that I tell you. . . ."

The third key had arrived, and the officials were at that very moment proceeding to unlock the door.

A desperate feeling took the Parson for an instant, across the chest and around the heart, and he stared with a sudden fierce intensity round about the room, to see whether he might not come upon some plan to win a little more delay. Abruptly, as he stared, he noticed the lines still stretched across the floor, and the ball of cord lying in the corner.

Like lightning, an idea came to him, and he dashed at the ball; then went at a silent run to where the vast door of the strong-room fitted solidly into its rebates. It had the maker's name-plate screwed on solidly to the otherwise smooth inner side of the door, and the Parson pulled a small, beautiful turn-screw from his pocket, as he ran. He reached the door, and fitted the turn-screw into the notch of the heavy steel screw; then applied all his strength and skill, and the screw moved. In less than five, noiseless, intense seconds, the screw head was sticking out half an inch from the door. He took a swift turn with the cord round the head of the screw, and then round the metal, electric light switch-lever, which was screwed into the left wall, near to the edge of the

Digitized by Google

shut door. As the Parson took the turn with the cord, he caught the final directions from the muffled voice:—

"Key 1 to the left; key 3 to the right; key 2 to the right. Withdraw Numbers 1 and 2 keys; reverse Number 3. That's right. The door is unlocked. Pull it open."

As the muffled voice gave the final direction; the Parson, sweating until he was almost blind in that horrible moment, yet kept his nerve; and his swift fingers took turn after turn of the thin strong cord, from the screw head to the switch; back and forth; back and forth.

"The door's stuck," came one of the voices. "Have we worked the combination right?"

"Yes," answered the previous voice. "Pull a bit."

"Praise be!" muttered the Parson, as he drew his sleeve across his forehead. That'll hold a while; and they'll keep guessing on the combination. Maybe, the A'michty has a mind to let us go this once mair."

He tested the tightly strung bundle of cord, with a heavy pull; then, without a second look, he dived again into the drift.

"Look out, John!" he called, softly, as he approached. "It is I. We're safe a bit mair. How goes it, laddie? How goes it?"

"We—we'll do it yet, Parson," said Vardon, between shovelfuls, gasping as he spoke.

"Whist!" said Parson Guyles. "Whist! What's yon?"

Vardon stopped, and they both listened. . . . Someone was digging, on the other side of the piled up obstruction.

Digitized by Google

"It's yon honest de'il, Sandy," said the Parson. "Man, I do praise the A'michty for the goodness o' that."

"He's close, Parson!" said the engineer, still gasping. "Close! Do you understand? Only a few feet . . . My God, another few minutes, and we'll be away clear."

They spoke not a word more; but dug fiercely together into the remaining mound of earth. As they threw the earth between their knees, they scrambled it backwards with their feet, in a very orgy of effort, so that it mounded up behind them, half-way to the roof of the tunnel.

Suddenly, from the strong-room, there came a single sharp sound, like a rope snapping.

"It's gone!" gasped out the Parson, and whirled round. "They're into the room!"

In the same instant, John Vardon cried out, inarticulately, and Parson Guyles turned again swiftly, a thousand plans for action surging in him. He saw that a shovel, gripped by two grimy efficient hands, was stabbing through the earth that barred their escape. Sandy Mech had broken through!

From the direction of the strong-room, rose a loud incoherent outcry—a dozen men speaking at once. And then an instantaneous silence, and the flash of a bull's-eye lamp, along the drift.

"They're there, lads!" shouted a deep commanding voice. "After them! Follow me."

Sandy Mech's head and shoulders were half through from the cellar side now; and he saw their instant need.

Digitized by Google

"The roof, Parson!" he shouted. "Bring the roof down on 'em. Catch!"

He shot a short, heavy digging-spud, or flat ended bar, into the Parson's hand. Then he made another swift sweep with his shovel.

"There's room, John," he said. "Come on! Come on! Get clear out o' the Parson's road."

He literally hauled Vardon over the mound, by his head and shoulders, slithering him down on the cellar side, in a cloud of dust. Then back over the mound, to help the Parson; but the Parson needed no help. He was heaving mightily at the roof, with the spud. A big, bearded face had just loomed at him, over the mound that lay between him and the strong-room. And he had met it with all the weight of his body and fist. . . . The face had gone backwards, half-stunned; and he had attacked the roof ferociously again. Two other faces loomed, with lamps, and an automatic pistol was thrust at him.

The Parson gave a final heave; there was a roar of falling earth, and the reiterated explosion of a pistol, smothered. Then he was being hauled back by Sandy, half suffocated, over the mound on the cellar side. Between them and the strong-room, lay a barrier that would take, maybe, an hour to dig away.

"Sandy, lad," were the Parson's first words, as the three of them stood breathless and grimy in the cellar, "I owe ye apology for doubting ye. I told John, here, ye'd never ha' power to resist the temptation o' the moment. I ask pardon of ye, laddie. I'll no forget how ye proved ye'rsel' this night."

"Aw!" said Sandy Mech, "I ain't no tin god! I did think of it; but you an' me's been through some

Digitized by Google

jobs together, Parson; an' I'd a' hated you to get copped. And I'd a' had a job to shunt this stuff by me lonesome."

"Now, we got to move smartly," said Parson Guyles. "They'll maybe stay diggin' in the drift awhile; but they'll sure have men into all these basements, inside ten minutes. Pick up the gold. I'll take a bag and this sack o' bonds and notes. I regret sair we're leaving one in yonder. Now follow me. . . . Whist! Hear that now! Not a sound!"

A thunderous knocking rose from the entrance door.

"The police! They're on our track a'ready!" whispered Parson Guyles.

". . . his 'ands were all earthy!" they heard a heavy voice explaining excitedly. "I thought I'd keep an eye on 'im. . . . Nothing to be suspicious about then, or I'd 'ave watched him closer. . . ."

"I was right!" whispered the Parson. "Yon fat policeman must ha' noticed things; and he's brought 'em right on our heels. Come on!"

As he spoke, there came a heavy blow on the door, that made the whole basement boom and echo.

"Quick, after me," said the Parson. "That door'll be doon in a minute."

He went swiftly through the darkness towards the rear of the basement, and the two others followed, stumbling in the gloom, with the weight of precious metal each carried.

There came the click of a lock. Then, faintly, they could see the outline of an open doorway, with the loom of the night beyond.

"Smartly now!" said Parson Guyles. "Move quiet

Digitized by Google

an' noiseless as the de'il himsel. . . . Pause a wee, while I lock this door against them. . . . Hark to that!" as a crash resounded through the basement behind them. "They're in!"

He closed the door, quietly, and locked it, methodically withdrawing and pocketing the key.

"This is no' a proper way out, ye'll understan'!" he whispered. "There's no back entrances to this block; only this was a convenience that the last tenant of this basement arranged with the proprietor of the stable yard we're in now; and where I gave John the hint to keep his car. Step quiet, laddies. This way. To the left. . . . Now right. Here we are. Put the bags in, smart. I bid yon Williams lad ha' the lamps lit an' a' ready by two o'clock, an' I'm glad he's done as I told him. I explained that ma friend an' I were away to Edinboro' toon for the week end. . . . That you, Williams?" as a sleepy eyed yard-man appeared. "Here's half-a-crown, my man. Open the gates, an' let us away on oor holiday."

"Thank'ee, Sir," said the man. "I've had the lights lit this half hour."

He shambled to the gates, and began slowly to open them; while Vardon got into the driver's seat, and the Parson set the engine going.

"Throttle her, man," he said. "Not a sound more than need be. . . . What's yon man so long for!"

The man had the gates half open; but had apparently been spoken to by someone. As the car circled to approach the gates, the lamps showed something that sickened the three men in the car. Standing at the gate, questioning the man, whose replies sounded frightened and bewildered, were four big policemen,

Digitized by Google

and the foremost one was the burly officer whose voice they had heard a few minutes earlier, explaining about the Parson's hands.

Abruptly, as the light showed them, the four officers barred the way.

"Pardon me, gentlemen!" said the fat policeman, raising his bull's-eye, "we shall not keep you a moment, if all is right; but—— It's him!" he ended in a shout. "Collar him! A good thing I thought to try round the back here! Shut the gates!"

The four men, in a clump, turned to do so. In that instant, the Parson stooped swiftly, and pulled a large paper bag from under the seat. He sprang upright, and dashed it at the heads of the policemen. It burst against one of their helmets, and the car's head-lights shone on a grey cloud of dust that filled the air around the police. The men in the car gasped for breath, and began to sneeze violently; but the policemen, caught literally in the thick of the cloud of pungent dust, reeled and staggered in all directions, gasping and sneezing hopelessly; for the Parson had burst a great paper bag of snuff and pepper right among them.

The Parson leaped right out among the stupefied men, hitting right and left with his fists, and clearing a path for the car in half a dozen seconds. He seized the doors, and dashed them wide open.

"Through wi' her, John!" he shouted, sneezing fiercely. "Through wi' her!"

Vardon obeyed, and the car leapt through. The Parson sprang on the foot-board, as the car swung out into the road; and as he did so, there came a thunder of blows on a door somewhere up the yard.

Digitized by Google

"To the left, John!" gasped the Parson. "Let her go!"

Ten minutes later, at a reasonable speed, the car was traversing one of the bridges over the river. Here, where they could see no one was about, they stopped the car, and John Vardon jumped out. He slipped off the number-plates, and disclosed fresh ones underneath.

"A good notion that, John," said Parson Guyles, as Vardon climbed back into his seat and re-started the car. "I flatter mysel' that notion o' the snuff-mixture was good, too, laddies. I've tried that trick before; and it always comes off, and no one the worse for it, either. Also, I'm thinkin' it's as well I made ye both up sae careful, too. I wonder now how ye're photos will turn out."

"What?" asked both men.

"Why!" said the Parson. "Yon box o' tricks we've just been emptyin', had a deal o' notions about it. Did ye not see yon flash, after the alarm rang? Well, I guess, laddies, that's a photograph apparatus, that one, Jamie MacAllister (they're a' Scots men, ye notice) invented; and it's to photograph any act o' irregularity that may occur. Ye micht ca' oor's somehow irregular, maybe."

The two men laughed.

"The Lord forgie me," said Parson Guyles, growing more and more Scottish; "but I feel that licht hearted, I must crack a joke on ma ain sins!"

"I'm that way, always, Parson, after a job," said Sandy Mech, nodding in the darkness. "I don't reckon much of conscience when you've got the oof safe away. That's my way o' lookin' at it."

Digitized by Google

But John Vardon said nothing.

CHAPTER X

It was a week later, and Parson Guyles and John Vardon were walking up and down the platform of a provincial railway station.

"John Vardon," said the Parson, quietly, as the train steamed in, "I hold ye to ye're given word."

"I'll keep it, Parson," said Vardon, looking squarely at Parson Guyles. "You're a fine man, Parson——"

"Na! Na! Man! Oh dinna shame me mair! Dinna shame me mair!" cried out the Parson, in very distress. "God go with ye an' guide ye.

"An' God help me," he muttered, as they turned, each his own way.

Digitized by Google

D.C.O. CARGUNKA

THE BELLS OF THE "LAUGHING SALLY"

"AH!" said Cargunka to his reflection in the broken looking-glass under his office desk, "cleanliness may be next to Godliness; but I reckon good cooking *is* Godliness. . . . Leastways, there's precious little Godliness in a man wiv indisgestion!"

He was sitting on a tea-chest in his office at the back of the dirty but important marine stores which fill half one side of Gallows Lane, in the town of Appledaulf, on the South coast. The Marine stores belonged to him, as did the Red Lyon, public-house, next door.

He sat on the tea-chest at this particular hour every morning, and peeled potatoes; for cooking was his hobby, almost his passion. The tea-chest had been hacked down to make a low seat, and he chose it, because—as he said—it "gave to his bones"; also, though of this he said nothing, the height of it brought his face below the level of his office desk, where reposed the broken mirror that I have already mentioned, and in which, from time to time, he looked at himself with infinite satisfaction, pushing back his

Digitized by Google

hair from over his shaven temples, and taking great care not to damp the hair with his wet hand; for the curls were not Nature's, but the curls of Hinde's curlers, which he wore secretly every night.

He finished peeling the last of his potatoes, and wiped his hands thoroughly on his apron. Then, he closed and pocketed the diminutive copy of Byron's Poems which had been propped up on the chair, at the back of the basin into which he had put the peeled potatoes. He turned to a phonograph, which stood on the top of a Tate's sugar box, and changed the wax cylinder. He wound the machine leisurely, and set it going. It was a new record, and he listened expectantly. There came a short prelude on a piano, and there burst out a splendid, rich contralto, so fine and good, that even the whir of the machine failed completely to destroy its essential humanity, which marked its quality.

Cargunka leaned back contentedly.

"My word!" he said; "that's good! That's fine!"

"Eight bells!
And the *Laughing Sally* sailed away,
And the sound of the bells came back to me
Across the sea
Across the sea
The sound of the bells came back to me
As the *Laughing Sally* sailed that day
Away and away with thee,
My Man,
Away with thee."

The deep contralto silenced, and there came the brief tinkle of the piano, as the phonograph ground away.

Digitized by Google

"That's sure the song they made up about ole Cap'n Barstow's ship," muttered Cargunka, reflectively. "She never come back; an' that's three year, last Christmas as ever was . . . as ever was! Aye, they sure sail away. Like as I shall do some day, maybe. . . . They do say as he carried a sight of brass wiv him. . . . He never would trust no banks; I do know that. . . ."

The voice broke out again: —

> "And I stood on the shore and cried to thee
> That day Love sailed away from me. . . ."

And so to the end of the second stanza, which found Cargunka furtively rubbing one eye in sentimental fashion, with the corner of his dirty apron.

"Aye!" he said, "an' the bells of the *Laughin' Sally* ring across the sea. . . . I guess that's how it'll be wiv me."

He pulled out a note-book, and jotted down the rhyme; then blew his nose. He was thinking of the two brigs that he owned, and of the periodic trips he made in them, between Appledaulf and far off San Francisco, where he owned the Dot-And-Carry-One Saloon, on the Water Front. Some day, he felt, there would be a song about one of his ships, when she went missing. As he conned over possible rhymes, the phonograph gave out the beginning of the third stanza: —

> "The *Laughing Sally* sailed away
> Into the Evermore that day,
> And the sound of her bells came back to me
> Across the deep in the evening grey. . . ."

Cargunka wiped his eyes soberly, and made shift

Digitized by Google

to jot down two fresh rhymes that had just occurred to him.

"My word!" he muttered; "that's first chop! That's mag-ni-ficent:—

"The *Happy Return,* she sailed away
And her bell ting-tinged the livelong day. . . ."

he wrote down, laboriously. He was obviously thinking of one of his own brigs.

The phonograph began the fourth stanza of the "Fate of the *Laughing Sally,*" and Cargunka lay back to enjoy it, with his eyes closed. He was interrupted in his æsthetic pleasures in an almost incomprehensible fashion; for Jensag, his quietly superior barman, ordinarily intensely silent and grave, had dashed suddenly in through the doorway that opened out of the back of the bar into Cargunka's office.

"Stop it!" shouted Jensag, in a voice of extraordinary energy. "Stop it!"

"And the bells of the *Laughing Sally* ring,
And die away forever. . . ."

sang the phonograph.

"Stop it!" roared Jensag. "Stop it!" He barged crashing over the bucket of dirty water and peelings; then rose and kicked the bucket across the office. "Stop it!" he shouted, once more.

Cargunka rose to his full height of five feet, two, and turned upon the big, clean-shaven, white-faced, strangely tensed-up barman.

"Get—out—of—here!" he said, slowly; gritting out the words at spaced intervals.

"And the bells grow faint and lost,"

sang the phonograph.

Digitized by Google

"Stop it!" roared Jensag. "Stop it! Stop it!"

"Get ont!" said Cargunka, still in a slow voice.

"I'll stop it myself!" said the bartender, in a voice that was suddenly quiet and quivering with an extraordinary, fierce suppression.

He made one swift step towards the machine, swung up a quick foot, and the phonograph flew across the office, wailing the one word:—"Bells," and fell with a crash into a ruin of broken woodwork, tin and disrupted clockwork.

"My Oath!" said Cargunka, still in that slow, quiet voice. "My old man used ter reckon we was a saved family an' he brought us up peaceful; but he always said as the Lord had no sort of use for worms. . . ." He began to take off his coat, with a curious cheerful look shining in the back of his well-shaped, dark blue eyes.

He stepped past the still quivering barman, and thrust his head through the open doorway into the back of the bar.

"M'ria!" he shouted, "come an' take the bar!"

Then he walked back into his office, closed the door quietly after him, and spoke to the big bartender:—

"Come along out into the big room, my lad," he said, "an' take your coat off. You can come in wiv the explanations after."

The bartender said something in a queer voice, that might have been a protest; then, as if realising the futility of anything that he might say, at this tense stage of affairs, he took off his coat, and followed the halting, "dot-and-carry" step of his master.

Digitized by Google

In the big room, Cargunka wheeled round smartly:—

"Put your hands up, my lad," he said, quietly. "We'll see if you's as good at fightin' as you is at bustin' up good property."

The big barman, at this point, made an ineffectual effort to say something; but Cargunka headed him off. "Fight!" he said. "Talk afterwards! My Oath! I've not had a do for a month of Sundays!"

Then they fought.

* * * * *

"I'm never friends to no man!" said Cargunka, five minutes later, as he pillowed the big barman's head in the crook of his arm, and poured some very good brandy down his throat; "not till I've knocked 'ell out of 'im."

He thrust one long, enormously muscular arm under the big man's thighs, and lifted him easily to an old cabin settee, that stood against one wall of the big room.

CHAPTER II

"Now, my lad, we'll talk," said Cargunka, when the big barman came round from his knock-out. "What was up wiv you, to come into my office like you did, bustin' up things? You just talk to me as if I was your old man. I guess a bit of it, an' you needn't fear to tell it all straight out. Was it the lady in the phonygraft, or was she singin' your donah's song, that's dead an' gone this while back?"

Digitized by Google

With further persuasion, of a rough but kindly sort, the big barman told the whole brief tale.

"That was Stella Bavanga singing," he said, in a strange voice. "That was her stage name. 'The Fate of the *Laughing Sally*' was her big song. It was written five years ago, when the four-masted schooner, *Laughing Sally*, was given up for lost. About a year and a half later, Stella got a fit of bad health, and the doctor said she'd have to go a sea voyage. She went for a trip in a barque of the same name as the schooner that was lost. A man named Barstow was the Captain; a queer sort of man. I hated her to go. Yes, I was the husband of Stella Bavanga; and I was superstitious about the name . . . . after the song, you know. My God! I heard the bell ring, as she went down the river. You know the rest; she never came back; and I lost all interest in life. I've come down now to bar-tending! She made that record. She did a lot of that work. . . ."

Dot-and-Carry-One Cargunka's eyes shone, as the sympathy and sentiment rose in him:—

"My Oath!" he muttered, gently. "My Oath! I'm glad you broke the bloomin' phonygraft! I'd a broke the ole bloomin' shop up, if I'd been in your cloes!"

CHAPTER III

"Strike me pink!" said a burly-looking man to D.C.O. Cargunka, some weeks later. "I tell yous, ole Dot-an'-Carry, I made no blame error. It was the barque herself. I recernised 'er by the skull-

Digitized by Google

work round the 'ouse. We blew past, not twenty fathoms outside the reef. I thought we'd sure have our bottom scratched right off'n us, I did that, we was that close in. She was right in over the reef; close up agin the cliff face, as snug as a wop in a rug. However she come there, the Lord, He knows. I don't.

"No one else recernised 'er, but me; an' I kep' it to tell you. I knowed you'd play fair, an' give me the worf of the news, or a share; I don't mind so which way it comes to me. Ole Barstow carried his brass wiv him, an' there should be a pile; he didn't trust no banks; same's he didn't trust no wimmin. I've heard him say so many a time, when I sailed wiv him. Once, when it was a blame calm, I heard money chinkin' down below, an' I went an' peeped down the cabin skylight; and there was the Ole Man wiv it in a bucket. Strike me! but I'm speakin' trewth. The ole devil had it in a wooden poop-bucket, all sovrins, an' he was runnin' 's hands through it, like as you might run your fists through a bucket of peas. I guess he was just dotty on that oof of his. An' it'll be in her right this moment, if no blame thief han't got to her first; an' I doubt they'd find the cash; for she was middlin' near up to her rails; so I guess she's full up wiv sea-water, an' you'll need to take a pump an' a divin' outfit. Now then, ole Dot-an'-Carry, what's it going to be?"

"Where's the island?" asked Dot-and-Carry-One Cargunka. "Give it a name, my lad."

"Not much, ole D.C.O.! Not much! You fix up what it's worf to me first!" said the man.

"A quarter of all we get," said Cargunka, after

Digitized by Google

thinking a minute. "That's if I decide to 'ave a go at it."

"'Arf!" said the man. "Make it 'arf, D.C.O.?"

"No," said Cargunka. "You'll get your quarter clear. I've got to stan' all the expense. Turn up the name, or I'll drop out!"

"It's yon Three Finger Island, out to the West of the Vardee Islands," said the man. "You sign me on as bo'sun, Dot-an'-Carry. They told me down to the wharf, as you was takin' a run out to 'Frisco, 's soon as the *Happy Return* was ready. She ain't no bo'sun; an' it won't be much off our course to run in to them Vardee Islands, an' lift the stuff. There should be a matter of thousands, by my reckoning."

And so it was settled.

CHAPTER IV

Cargunka stood on the lee side of the poop of the *Happy Return*, and stared away to leeward. They were a hundred and four days out from England, and had sighted Three Finger Island at daybreak.

Through the telescope, Cargunka could now see the wreck of the *Laughing Sally*, inside the reef of the island, and close in-shore. She was almost submerged; yet Cargunka had recognised her at once, by a number of details, one of which was the quaint, white-painted skull-beading round the top of her poop deck-house.

Suddenly, D.C.O. Cargunka walked away aft, and knocked three times on the deck with his heel.

Digitized by Google

Immediately, as though he had been waiting only for the signal, there sprang up through the after scuttle, Jensag, Cargunka's one-time barman at the Red Lyon. Cargunka had brought him with him on this trip, for the man had heard something of the truth from Durrit, the one who had brought the news; and he had begged so hard to be allowed to come, that Cargunka had at last signed him on as steward; feeling that it might be kinder for the poor fellow to realise, by an actual sight of the wreck, that it was utterly useless to begin hoping any vague hopes concerning his long-dead wife.

"Now, my lad," said Cargunka, handing his own telescope to the shaking man, "you get a hold of yourself. I told you not to get hopin'. Take a look, an' you'll see she's deep in the water. There's no more than 'er deck-house and fo'cas'le-'ead deck above. It's three year since she must have struck there; and there's just no chance at all as you'll find a soul. Leastways, not humanly speakin', lad. Though the Almighty, He can do wonderful things, like. But, for all sakes! don't get hopin' anything at all. There's a dozen things that tells me already as there's not any livin' human ashore yon."

The steward said nothing in reply. He was busy, trying to hold the glass steady; but at last had to give up the attempt, because he shook so that he could not bring it to bear on any one point for more than a fraction of time.

It was late in the afternoon, when the *Happy Return* let go her anchor within the shelter of the reef, not more than a hundred fathoms away from the place where the wreck of the *Laughing Sally* lay

Digitized by Google

with only her deck-house top and masts in view above the water.

"You can let the men go ashore for a run, Mister," said Cargunka to the Skipper, "as soon as you've got all snug and tidied up. Tell the steward to give 'em some grub, an' they can take one of the boilers and a kettle out of my galley. I'll run ashore presently an' cook them up somethin' for their picnic. Let the steward go wiv 'em. I guess he'll be easier if we let him search round a bit, poor devil."

The men put on a spurt to make all snug, when they heard from the Skipper that they were to be allowed ashore; and meanwhile, Cargunka had the little shore-punt put over the side; for he meant to make a visit to the wreck, and see how she lay. He climbed down into the punt, and sculled her over to the *Laughing Sally*. Yet he could distinguish little under the water; for the light of the sun lay now across the sea, and made it impossible to see to any depth. He could make out vaguely, however, the outline of the submerged fo'cas'le head; and, rising from it, the dome and framework of the ship's brass bell, showing a vague, green shape of verdigris, just below the surface; for the whole of the vessel was covered, as I have said, except the top of the poop deck-house and the three stumps of the masts.

Cargunka realised that he could discover nothing further that evening. The tide was at its highest, and he knew the wreck would be partially uncovered at low water, as it had been when he saw it first through the telescope, earlier in the day. Meanwhile, as he could do nothing, he put the punt round, and

Digitized by Google

sculled ashore to where the men were making a fire on the beach.

Presently, he was indulging in his hobby of cooking, which was so strong a need in him, that he never signed on a cook when he took a voyage in one of his brigs; but did all the cooking himself, occupying strictly the position of cook (or "Doctor" in sea-parlance); but claiming his rights as Owner, as soon as the second dog-watch came along each evening; when he would shed his long apron, and ascend to the poop; there to occupy the Captain's deck-chair, the while that he smoked and yarned.

Cargunka kept a couple of the men by him, as temporary cook's mates, as he chose to call them; but the rest, he allowed to go off at their own will; warning them, however, to keep their ears open for the "dinner gong." It was growing dusk, by the time that he had cooked a meal that seemed to him worthy of the occasion, and he and his two "cook's mates" were warm and perspiring. The dinner gong, he achieved by the simple expedient of singing out to the Mate in the brig, to strike eight bells; for it was close upon eight o'clock.

Now you must remember that it was just coming on dusk (the somewhat brief dusk of the semi-tropics); though both the brig and the sunken barque were in plain view from the beach, and no more than a little vague with the first shadowing of evening. Yet, despite, as I have shown, that nothing was yet hidden by the night, a most extraordinary and quite inexplicable thing occurred. For, as the deep notes of the brig's forrard bell died away across the water, there came, like an answer, from the direction of the

Digitized by Google

submerged barque, eight eldrich, sharp, thin-sounding strokes on a bell.

Cargunka jumped, and swore suddenly.

"My Oath!" he said, and stared away towards the barque. He noticed that the tide had fallen now, and the rail around the fo'cas'le head had become unsubmerged. It was to the after part of this rail that the barque's ship's-bell was fixed, and it showed now, a shape of verdigris brass, dumb and immutable.

"My Oath!" said Cargunka again, and limped away from the fire, down the beach to the water. "My Oath!" he muttered, once more, as he stopped and stared out at the barque. "That's rum! Who the blamed Thump is playin' the blessed goat!"

He put his hands to his mouth, and hailed the brig.

"A-a-hoy there!" he sung out. "A-a-ahoy!"

Then, as the Mate's face showed over the rail:—

"Did you hear that, Mister?" he shouted. "Did you hear that? Take a look at the barque from where you are. Is there anyone there?"

The Mate ran across the deck, without a word, and stared under his hands, both at the barque's poop deck-house and her fo'cas'le-head rail; for, otherwise, the whole hulk of her was still entirely submerged. In a minute, he was back again at the landward rail of the brig.

"There's nothin', Sir! Nothing at all!" he shouted back.

"Did you hear that other bell go?" roared Cargunka.

Digitized by Google

"Yes, Sir, I certainly heard something," replied the Mate, as non-committal as possible.

"You heard somethin'! My Oath! I should say you did!" replied Cargunka. He turned to the two men behind him, where they both stood, looking in a puzzled fashion towards the wreck. "Did you men hear nothin'?" queried Cargunka.

"Yes, Sir, we bofe 'eard it," answered one of the men. "Someone struck eight bells over yon on the barque." He looked from Cargunka to the barque and back again; then scratched his head violently.

"Get into the punt," said Cargunka; and stepped in after them, in his long apron. "Pull me out round the barque!"

This was done; but though they rounded the barque twice, there was not a thing to see, beyond the top of the submerged deck-house, the stumps of the three wooden masts, and the rail around the fo'cas'le head, with the bell upon it, about a foot clear of the surface of the sea. As they came opposite to the bell for the second time, Cargunka spoke to the men:—

"Shove me in, just abaft the head, as close as you can. There's plenty water over her to float the boat. I want to 'ave a look at that bell."

The men obeyed, and in a few moments, Cargunka was leaning out over the boat, feeling up inside the bell for the tongue and lanyard.

"My Oath!" he muttered, suddenly. "There ain't no striker. It's unshipped, sure!" Then, abruptly, as a thought struck him:—"Pass me over a thole-pin."

He reached out for the wooden pin, and as soon

Digitized by Google

as it was given to him, he struck the bell smartly with it. The bell gave out the identical, attenuated, sharply-thin note that they had heard directly after the bell of the *Happy Return* was struck.

The men jumped unaccountably at the sound; as if it were already associated in their minds with something uncomfortably peculiar; but Cargunka merely listened intently; then struck the bell a second time, making it give out once more the thin, far-away sound.

"My Oath!" he muttered, then. "That's mighty rum! Mighty rum!"

He bent and examined the bell, with the light of a match, both inside and out; for the dusk was deepening; but it was just an ordinary ship's bell . . . a mere shape of solidly-fixed brass, tongueless and alone, there above the darkening sea. . . . And then, in a queerly effective way, it came home to Cargunka that the drowned hull of the vessel was close below them. Somehow, there in the increasing dark, the realisation came home to him, curiously clear, with something of a queer, vague, dreary, uncomfortable feeling.

"Ug!" he said. "A blessed sea-churchyard she is!" And he took his supporting hand from the dank, water-sodden rail. "She's fair got the stink of sea-slime on 'er! Back out, my lads, an' let's get our suppers. The Lord knows what we heard, or what we thought we heard. I'm middling sure, though, this bell's never 'ad a clapper in it, not these last three year, or more. My Oath! Pull, lads; there's the men all back, an' smellin' the cookin';

Digitized by Google

and small blame to 'em, though I say it! Pull, my sons!"

When Cargunka got ashore, he found all the men waiting, except the steward. Some of them had seen the man last, away up in the woods of the island; but he had seemed so anxious to be alone, that none of them had bothered him.

"Now, men," said Cargunka, "move around handy! Two of you take the punt off wiv my compliments, an' ask the Mate and the Cap'n if they'll come an' join us for a snack. If the steward don't turn up, poor devil, so much the worse for 'im. Move now!"

The men were early back with the Captain; but it appeared that the Mate had taken temporary offence at Cargunka's tone, when Cargunka questioned him regarding the bell-sounds; and so the Mate had decided to stay aboard and nurse his vanity. This, however, bothered no one; and the meal was soon in full swing, with only an occasional expression of regret that the steward was missing it all. Once, far away, through the quiet forests of the island, they heard his voice, calling.

"Poor devil!" said Cargunka; and therewith dismissed him.

After the dinner, or supper, there was plenty of watered rum, with resultant cheerfulness and songs, which were kept up until nearly midnight. About eleven thirty, the singing was dropped, and various cuffers were spun; during which Cargunka and his Captain discussed the puzzle of the bell-sounds which he was convinced he had heard earlier, as you know. The Captain, however, felt that there must

Digitized by Google

be some simple explanation—some freakish echo, perhaps.

It was just as the Captain made this suggestion, that eight bells were struck by the Mate aboard the brig. There came a sudden expectant silence upon the men about the fire; but never a sound followed, though they waited several minutes.

"No echo there, Cap'n!" said Cargunka.

The words were not fully spoken when, clear and thin, with that curious far-away quality in the sound that Cargunka had previously noted, there came the sharp:—ting-ting, ting-ting, ting-ting, ting-ting of the bell upon the wreck.

There came a burst of exclamations from the men about the fire; and both Cargunka and his Captain jumped to their feet.

"My Oath! Cap'n, did you hear *that*?" said Cargunka. Then, without a pause:—"The boat, smart, Cap'n! Maybe that poor mad devil of a steward is playin' some fool-game. You mind the song, Cap'n?"

"Stop!" said the Captain, abruptly. "Listen!" He held up his hand; and they all heard it, then—the voice of the steward, far away on the other side of the island, calling:—"Agnes! Agnes!" or, at least, that is how it sounded; his voice coming strange and small through the hush of the night, incredibly faint.

"Poor lad!" said the Captain. "It's not him at the bell, that's plain."

"The boat, quick!" interrupted Cargunka. "There's somethin' mighty rum in this business. Bring one of them burnin' faggots wiv you, Cap'n. Buck after me smart!"

Digitized by Google

Even as he spoke, he was racing down the strip of sand to the boats. The Captain snatched up a blazing, resinous branch out of the fire, and ran after him, the wood flaring and crackling as he dashed down the beach. The two of them leaped aboard the punt, and the men, who had followed at a run, shoved the boat out good and strong; then lined up along the shore, to watch.

Cargunka shipped a pair of the oars, and rowed, whilst the Captain stood in the bows, and held the blazing branch high over his head, as he stared towards the sunken barque. Cargunka headed the boat straight for the fo'cas'le, standing with his face towards the bows of the boat. He pushed the boat right in over the submerged fore-deck of the barque, drew in his oars, and caught at the bell. The tide had risen, and he found the water now within four or five inches of the bell. He struck a match, and examined the bell again, feeling inside it, and all round about.

"Nothin' here, Cap'n," he muttered. He reached for a thole-pin. "Listen," he said, and struck the bell, smartly. It gave back the same clear, thin sound they had heard.

"That's sure what we heard, Cap'n," said Cargunka. "Now what devilment have we run into? That's what I want to know!"

Cargunka backed the boat out from over the submerged vessel, and began to pull slowly round her, with the Captain holding up the burning, resinous branch, which cast a fitful, uneasy, flickering light over the dark water of the near lagoon, showing the strangely painted top of the deck-house aft, and the green-rusted shape of the bell forrard, with the three

Digitized by Google

stumps of the naked slimy masts growing up, as it were, out of the oily quiet of the water between. At times, as the light flared up, the whole of these details would spring into clear view; then, as the light fell, a comparative darkness would come.

Thrice the boat circumnavigated the long-sunken craft; but never a thing could either Cargunka or his Captain find to explain that uncomfortable striking of the bell.

Presently, Cargunka lay on his oars.

"What do you make of it, Cap'n?" he asked, in a low voice.

"I'm completely puzzled, Sir," said the Captain. "In a way, I don't like it. . . . I mean it's funny. It's a bit beastly, somehow, you know."

Cargunka nodded; then, as a notion seemed to strike him suddenly, he turned and paddled quietly towards the brig. When he had brought the boat quite near, he hailed the Mate, in a low voice, and told him to strike eight bells a second time. This the Mate did; but though the Captain and Cargunka waited silently in the punt for some minutes, there came no answering bells from the submerged craft.

"Now, look here," called Cargunka up to the Mate. "As soon as it's half past twelve, strike one bell, like as if we was at sea."

"What's your notion, Sir?" asked the Captain.

"I'm blest if I know, myself," answered Cargunka. "I'm half beginnin' to think things I'd not care to put into words. You noticed that blessed dead hulk yonder took no sort of notice of the *fake* eight-bells. Well, now I'm going to see if it answers just only those bells as is struck at the *proper* times. More'n

Digitized by Google

that, I just carn't say, Cap'n; for I'm blowed if I know myself what I thinks or believes."

Cargunka began to paddle the punt noiselessly across again to the submerged vessel, explaining, as he did so, that he meant to go back unseen, if possible; and as the night was very dark, and the water gave out no ripples of phosphorescence under the oars, it was not difficult; for the Captain's torch had long since died out and been dumped into the water.

Very slowly, Cargunka urged the boat across, until, at last, they were lying within some three or four fathoms of the bell; though they could only know its position approximately by their distance from the stump of the foremast, which rose up into dim visibility against the night-sky, about four fathoms off their starboard bow.

Cargunka lay on his oars, keeping the boat in position, by an occasional, gentle stroke; and thus for some minutes there was an almost perfect quiet, through which came the low, constant roar of the fine-weather seas upon the outer reef, and the odd mutter of talk from the men along the beach; they being plain also to see, by reason of the fire which still burned cheerfully behind them, up the beach.

As Cargunka sat, listening for any vague sound that might come from the direction of the submerged hulk, he heard the Captain moving cautiously aft in the punt towards him; and then the Captain was whispering:—"Hark, Sir! I'm sure he's singing."

Cargunka heard it then, a voice coming far and thin through the night; one moment plain to be heard, though infinitely remote; and then, again, lost,

Digitized by Google

as some eddy of the night airs carried the sounds astray.

"Poor devil!" muttered Cargunka. "'ee'll sure go barmy, if we don't corral 'im, an' bring him in, an' get 'im sensible. It's mighty strange soundin', to 'ear him singin' like that, now, away over there by his lonesome. Maybe he's thinkin' she'll hear, if she's anywheres on the island. But there's no one ashore yon. I told the men to have a good look round, while I was makin' supper; an' they none of 'em saw a thing; an' they fair covered the island wiv their noise an' singin' an' shouting. There's no castaways ashore yon, as well I knew; an' I thought maybe to get yon poor feller more settled in his mind, if I could let 'im see for himself. I wish now I'd left him to home. Hark to him now!——"

A single line was wafted far and clear and faint to them through the night upon the island:—

"The *Laughing Sally* sailed away——"

From the brig, at this instant, there came, deep and sonorous, the single stroke of the ship's bell, as the Mate struck the half past midnight, exactly to the moment by the chronometer.

"Ssdt!" whispered Cargunka, and stiffened into rigid intensity, listening, and staring unblinkingly towards the spot where he knew the bell must be. As he sat there, in a half-conscious fashion he caught a second odd line of the remote singer's, as it floated faintly through the night air:—

"And the sound of her bells came back to me——"

Even as he heard, and half comprehended the

Digitized by Google

words, there came a single, incredible sound from the sunken barque—the solitary, thin "ting" of the bell; yet curiously muffled, and seeming to be no more than a couple of fathoms off the port bow of the little punt. Evidently they had come closer to the bell, than Cargunka had guessed.

A strange, extraordinary thrill, that made him shiver vaguely, travelled swiftly over the back of his head. Then, without a word, he dashed the oars into the water, and drove the boat towards the sound.

"Strike a light, Cap'n. . . . Quick!" he whispered tensely. But instead of the Captain obeying, he backed suddenly upon Cargunka, in the darkness, with a muttered:—"Let's get out of here! Let's get out of here!"

"My Oath! Yes. . . . When I'M done!" said Cargunka, and crammed him down savagely on to a thwart. He drew out his own box of matches, and struck a light. He found that he had driven the punt close beside the bell, and that the bell was now partly submerged by the rising tide, which detail, he realised, had likely enough caused the sound to be muffled. The Captain had himself in hand by now, and fished out his own matches, which he struck and held, whilst his Owner examined the bell, feeling all about it, inside and out.

Presently, Cargunka stood upright, his hands and sleeves dripping sea-water.

"My Oath, Cap'n!" he said. "What sort of funny devil-work have we sure struck now!"

"I don't know, Sir," said the Captain, in a low voice. "I don't like to say what I think. I'm not a fanciful sort of man; but I don't like this; and I don't think

Digitized by Google

we're being wise to be here just now in the dark. I think we ought to get away ashore right now."

"I'm wiv you, Cap'n," replied Cargunka, quietly. "It's just a peg outside my understandin'; and I don't like it, no how."

He reached for the oars, which were still lying loosely in the thole-pins, and drove the boat astern, clear away from the wreck; then headed her round for the shore, where the sailormen had grouped together, talking in low tones. Behind the men, the fire showed the gloom of the near border of the forests that covered the island. Whilst above, against the starlight, loomed vaguely the three great Peaks, from which the island had gained its name.

"The song about the bells, Sir! . . . and then that bell striking like that!" said the Captain, suddenly, as they neared the shore. "It's making me think along pretty rum lines."

"My Oath, yes, Cap'n," said Cargunka, and drove the boat ashore near the group of seamen, who hauled her up, questioning a hundred questions, and voicing a score of quaint superstitions, as they did so. But it was Durrit, the bo'sun, who said out nakedly the quaintest and perhaps the ugliest:—

"That's a dead man's bell, Cap'n," he said, earnestly. "Strike me! but there's no good'll come messin' round wiv *that!*"

"You go an' boil yourself, my lad!" said Cargunka. "Now then, stow all this talk, an' spread out and find the steward."

But not a man of them would budge, declaring there was something rum about the island, and Durrit was so badly scared that he offered to forgo his prospec-

Digitized by Google

tive share of any of old Captain Barstow's money that might be found, if only Cargunka would up anchor and away.

Cargunka, however, consigned him to the devil, and ordered him and all the crew aboard, with their gear; telling them to leave the punt. Then he called to the Captain, and the two of them made their way through the darkness towards where they had last heard the steward. From time to time, as they went, they would catch the faint sound of his voice in the distance, which was some sort of a guide; though puzzling, as the man appeared to be on the roam the whole time. Eventually, however, they ran him down; and persuaded him to be sensible, and come aboard, which he did; though in a heavy and silent fashion, as if he were dazed with the emotions of hope and despair through which he had been passing.

CHAPTER V

The following morning, Cargunka sent the men ashore, with the Second Mate, to make a thorough search of the island, and he allowed the steward to accompany them. Meanwhile, he and the Mate superintended the getting of the diving gear into one of the lifeboats, which had been lowered over-side.

The bell of the wreck had been submerged, during the remainder of the night; and there had been no more of that incredible ringing in the darkness; nor had there been any uncomfortable repetition of the sound in the daylight.

Because of this, and because things of a seeming

Digitized by Google

infernalness always appear less dreadful and more capable of normal explanation in the daytime, Durrit, the bo'sun, had got his courage back again, and there was no more talk of running out to sea, without even an attempt to discover the hidden money.

This was a fortunate thing; as Durrit was the only man aboard who had ever been down in a diving suit, and he alone understood perfectly the use of all the apparatus.

When everything had been got ready, Cargunka, Durrit, the Mate and Captain Gell put off in the life-boat to the wreck. One of the reasons for sending the men ashore, was to insure their being out of the way, as much as possible; for Cargunka thought it might be possible to get at the money readily, and so bring it safely aboard the brig, without any of the crew knowing. Therefore, he drove them all in the boat to haste, and in a very few minutes they were moored securely alongside the temporarily unsubmerged port rail of the poop; this being now above water, as was the deck of the fo'cas'le head, away forrard, owing to the tide being lower than either of the other tides they had witnessed since they approached the island.

Durrit, who had got into his gear and helmet, climbed out of the boat, and in over the port rail of the poop. He walked, knee-deep across the sodden, water-covered poop-deck, and stumped heavily aft to the companionway, which was open, and then with a wave of his hand, began to climb down the weed covered steps, backwards, sailor-fashion. The Mate was pumping, whilst the Captain and Cargunka attended the air-pipe and life-line. They watched the big copper helmet vanish with a jerky bob below the

Digitized by Google

water; and then, after that, for a few seconds, there was merely the eddying of the water, growing quieter and quieter, in the mouth of the companionway, and the line and air-tube being taken slowly down.

Suddenly, there was a terrific twitch upon the life-line, dragging it clean out of Captain Gell's hands.

"Something wrong there!" said Cargunka, and leaped out of the boat, up to his knees on the submerged poop-deck, and grabbed the life-line out of the water. He raced to the mouth of the companionway, and leaned over it, while he took a strain upon the line; but though the Captain came to his aid, they could not budge it.

"I'm going down," said Cargunka, after a few seconds' pulling. He threw off his coat, and stuffed it on to the slide of the companionway; then, taking a deep breath, he ducked his head under water, caught at the life-line, and hauled himself down, head foremost. In a score of seconds, he had reached the dank, weed-hung alleyway below; and here, not a fathom beyond the foot of the steps, he found Durrit, lying in a dimly-seen heap. Cargunka forced himself lower, and caught at the diver, to lift him; then he thought of the fouled life-line, and traced it to the point where it had fouled. He discovered that it had become hitched around the heavy, brass knob of the steward's pantry, which opened into the alleyway, opposite the bottom of the stairs. He fumbled a moment, and then had it free of the green verdigris-caked knob.

He pulled himself swiftly back to the huddled diver, and caught him up in his arms. The man was easily lifted, despite the weight of his boots and helmet; yet he sagged so inertly, that Cargunka had to drag him

Digitized by Google

clumsily to the steps, slipping and staggering to resist the upsetting buoyancy of the water. At the bottom of the steps, Cargunka dropped Durrit with a thud, and made one mad dash upward for breath, bursting out through the water in the companionway, with a swirl and a gasp that made Captain Gell jump back.

"I've got him to the steps' bottom," said Cargunka, as he drew the air eagerly into his lungs. "We'll lug 'im out wiv the line."

The two of them tailed on, and in a few seconds they had the limp figure of Durrit above water. They carried him to the boat and removed his helmet, and soon the man stirred, and swallowed some of the rum that Captain Gell was trying to force into him. He was quite himself again within ten minutes, and able and willing to put on his helmet and go down again. Yet he could not explain the cause of his collapse, nor the curious hitching of his line about the door-handle. All he knew was that, when he got to the bottom of the steps, he had faced round towards the main cabin. Then, as he began to go down the alley-way, he had felt a sudden, horrible pain between his shoulder blades. That was all that he could remember, until he found himself back in the boat again.

"Are you sure you ain't got a weak 'eart, my lad?" asked Cargunka. "It may have been the pressure of the water affected you?"

But Durrit was enormously indignant at the suggestion. He was absolutely sound and fit, he insisted. He said that the pain was not an "inside" pain; but like the pain a blow might give. He wriggled his shoulders, and complained that his neck hurt low

Digitized by Google

down at the back. Perhaps he had knocked himself, as he turned. . . .

"Strip your gear off your upper half, my lad," interrupted Cargunka. "You ain't goin' down yonder, 'nless I feel sure you ain't got a gammy 'eart."

The man grumbled; but obeyed. Casgunka looked at his back, and saw at once that there was a heavy-red mark, vaguely circular, at the base of the neck, covering the lower cervical vertebræ. There was nothing more to be seen; but it was obvious that in some way the man had sustained a heavy knock or blow. It was not his heart that had been at fault.

Cargunka told Durrit he might get into the gear again, and go down as soon as he felt fit. Yet he was vaguely uncomfortable. It was a funny thing for the man to have knocked himself sufficiently hard to stun himself, without being sure even that he had knocked against anything. And then the way that the line had got itself hitched round the pantry door-handle. That was a rum sort of thing to occur.

He fell to wishing that there had been a second diving suit. He found his thoughts reverting insistently to the extraordinary ringing of the bell. And then, suddenly, he got up from the thwart on which he had been sitting, and gave himself a vigorous mental shake. They had come out to the island to get that money, and they were going to get it; and as Durrit was the only one with them accustomed to diving, it was no use putting troublesome fancies or ideas into his head, especially as he did not seem to associate his accident with the possibility of anything "queer," as Cargunka phrased it.

The Captain and Cargunka helped Durrit again

Digitized by Google

into his diving-gear. The man had plainly got the gold-lust on him, and had apparently quite lost his over-night superstitions about the hulk. Moreover, as I have said, he had plainly never a thought to explain what had just happened, as being anything but a casual enough accident.

Yet, as the man's copper helmet jerked slowly below the surface of the water in the companionway, for the second time, Cargunka had an uncomfortable feeling at his heart, that he tried vainly to ridicule away. He was standing now close up to the companionway, letting the life-line carefully through his hands, whilst Captain Gell stood a fathom to his left, and did the same with the air-pipe.

Very intently, Cargunka allowed the line to go out, feeling it daintily all the time, for the least suspicion of a signal. And, extraordinarily enough, the thing happened again; for once more the line was jerked with a savage, desperate sort of jerk, as if Durrit were in instant need of help. Cargunka shouted; and the Captain jumped, floundering through the water on the deck, to help him. Together they hauled; yet again the line was fast, and they could not budge it.

"My Oath!" muttered Cargunka. "What is it! What is it!"

Then, without a word, he ducked his head again straight down into the water in the companionway, still gripping the line, and so hauled himself below from the Captain's sight. As he neared the bottom of the steps, he kept glancing all about him through the water. He stared hard along the passage, and saw something upon the floor of the alley. He hauled himself to it, and found the diver lying, still and

Digitized by Google

insensible. He hauled himself further along the line, and a queer little thrill of repulsion and apprehension came to him, as he realised that it was once more hitched to the knob of a door-handle—this time to the knob of the door leading into the big cabin.

Cargunka slipped the hitch hastily, with clumsy fingers; then struggled back to the body upon the floor. He caught it up in his arms, and rolled and slipped to the foot of the stairs, where he dropped the man, and dashed to the surface again.

"Haul him up! Haul him up!" he gasped, as he got his breath. After a few moments, he climbed out of the well-like companionway, and gave a hand with the line; yet the man did not come, and, with a sickening feeling, Cargunka took his breath deep, and went down into the water again. To his amazement, and real horror, he found that the bight of the line had been once more hitched by some unnatural means about the door-handle of the pantry. He cast off the line, for the third time, and lifted the man a little, so that he lay ready to be hauled up. As he did so, he had a sudden, incredible feeling of being watched —of being in danger, in some incomprehensible, deadly way. He whirled about clumsily in the water, and saw that the pantry door had been opened, showing the interior, a dank, pitch-black cavern of water and weed . . . and out of this, upside down, there was projected towards him an awful, sodden, bearded face, huge and horrible and blurred. With a courage that was partly a reflex of the sick, deadly fright that had him suddenly about the heart, Cargunka plunged clumsily through the water, at the thing, striking savagely, but ineffectually, with right and left; but it

Digitized by Google

was gone, and only the black cavern of the long-drowned steward's pantry, showed through the gloomy, weed-fringed oblong of the strangely opened doorway.

Cargunka's head struck the deck-beams of the alley-way; for, on letting go the line, he had floated up off his feet. He grabbed up at a beam now, and threw himself backwards, and dived swiftly up through the companionway. He threw out a gout of salt water, and gasped in his breath; then shouted "Pull!" to Captain Gell. He dragged himself up on to the top step, and staggered out on to the submerged deck, and even as he did so, the Captain had hauled the inert body of Durrit clear up into the daylight.

Between them, they got the diver again into the life-boat, and there they stripped off his diving tackle and took him aboard the ship; for it was at once evident to them that he had been badly hurt.

Here, after they had tried for an hour to bring him round, they convinced themselves that he was actually dead, and they carried him out on to the main-hatch, and left him there, with a blanket over him. Cargunka had already told what he had found and seen; and he announced now that he was going to put on the gear himself, and go down into the sunk ship, and see what unnatural thing was down there.

Both the Captain and the Mate begged Cargunka to drop the whole business; but this he refused to do, and told them that if they would not give him the necessary help, he would simply wait for the crew to return from their tramp ashore, and get three or four of them to work the pump and attend the line and the pipe.

Digitized by Google

Cargunka returned to the derelict, taking with him the Captain and the Mate, also the Carpenter, who had stayed aboard. He had taken careful notice of Durrit, and so had little real difficulty in getting into the suit.

Cargunka climbed heavily out of the boat, and waded across the deck to the companionway. The Captain and the Carpenter accompanied him, wading a little above their knees; for the tide was now on the rise. Cargunka stopped at the waiting mouth of the water-filled companionway, and took a slow glance round, through his three windows, at the sky and sea, as if unconsciously saying a possible goodbye.

Captain Gell took advantage of the opportunity, to take something from his pocket and thrust it into Cargunka's right hand. It was a heavy Colt; but Cargunka pushed it back at the Captain. The Captain put his face up against the helmet, and shouted:—"Take it, Sir. For God's sake, don't go down there with nothing but your hands. Take it, Sir, or I'm blowed if me and the Carpenter don't hold you up here."

Inside his big helmet, Cargunka's blue eyes flashed suddenly; then softened, as he allowed the genuine affection in his Captain's voice to conquer his quick anger at the Captain's suggestion of using force. He nodded inside the helmet, and Captain Gell, who had been looking in at his front window, pushed the weapon again into his hand. Then he began to go down the companionway; but, unlike the bo'sun, he went down frontways, not as a sailor goes, but as an average person goes downstairs.

As he reached the bottom of the steps, he saw, with

Digitized by Google

an extraordinary thrill, that the door of the steward's pantry was shut again. He took a step towards it, across the alleyway, meaning to push it with his foot. But, in the very act of doing so, it began slowly to open. It swung noiselessly wide, apparently without anything visible touching it, and Cargunka found himself staring once more into the pitch-black, weed-draped cavern of the long-sunk pantry. He stared, tensely and fiercely ready, with the pistol gripped for an instant shot. Then, as he sent his gaze circling swiftly round, he saw something that set every nerve in him quivering. A great, sodden-white hand was gripping the top of the door. The next instant, he saw something else, a great, water-blurred, bearded, weed-entangled face was coming down below the top of the door, into sight. And it was upside down. Cargunka backed one swift, clumsy step across the alleyway, and thrust his pistol at the thing. As he pulled the trigger, there was an enormous swirl, and something dankly-white and huge and enormously weighty dashed down at him, seemingly from the weed-grown ceiling of the pantry. Once, twice, thrice, he pulled the trigger, and the third time felt the muzzle of his pistol against the thing that was upon him. He could see nothing, for the boiling and swirling of the water. He was conscious of tremendous blows; and then, all in a moment, the boil of the water burst from him, and he was in the daylight above, with some huge thing gripped to him, thudding at him with enormous, mad, misdirected blows.

What had happened on deck was this:—

To the Captain and the Carpenter, waiting on the submerged poop-deck above, there had been a brief

Digitized by Google

few moments of quiet suspense, after the big dome of Cargunka's helmet had vanished under the water. They could not see him, owing to the sky-reflection on the surface, and the complete blackness below; but they had watched the line and the air-pipe trail jerkily after Cargunka, going slowly, foot by foot down into the gloom of the water, where it lay black and silent under the shadow of the half-drawn slide of the companion-hatch. And then there had come a pause; followed, abruptly, by three dull shocks, and a great swirl and commotion below the surface.

"Pull!" Captain Gell had roared. And he and the Carpenter had lain back on the life-line, pulling like madmen. Abruptly something had "given," and they had hauled in hand over hand, and there had burst up through the water in the companionway, the rubber and helmet covered Cargunka, with an enormous, naked, sodden-looking human body, that was gripped fiercely to Cargunka, and lashed about with its great legs.

As they hauled Cargunka and the thing clear up into the daylight, the naked body ceased to thrash about and strike, and loosed away from Cargunka, who immediately staggered, splashing and rolling, to his feet. Captain Gell and the Carpenter jumped to him, and set their arms about him, to support him clear of the thing that now beat about feebly, and bleeding, in the knee-deep water that covered the poop-deck. But Cargunka pulled away from the two of them, and turned to the thing in the water.

"Don't go near it!" shouted Captain Gell, in a tone of horror. "Don't go near it!"

As he spoke, the body rolled up its great bearded

Digitized by Google

face, and Cargunka let out a yell, that they could hear, despite his helmet.

"It's big ole Cap'n Barstow! It's big ole Cap'n Barstow!" he was shouting. And he backed away from the quietening body, even as the two others backed away, on catching what he was shouting; for it was fixed in all their minds that old Captain Barstow had been dead those three years.

Then, suddenly, Reason took hold again, and the three men jumped forward to lift the dying, drowning old man out of the water, that he was striving to keep his head above. They began to carry him to the boat; but he died on the way.

CHAPTER VI

They took the old man aboard the *Happy Return*, to put him beside the dead bo'sun. But here, to their delighted amazement, they found the bo'sun sitting up on the hatch, with his blanket round him, and his face full of bewilderment. They realised that they had been somewhat premature in their diagnoses; and the realisation made them re-examine the old Captain; but the three bullet-wounds made it unmistakably plain that here was no second case of temporarily suspended animation.

It was as they were attending to the bo'sun, who was still very weak and shaky, that they heard a constant murmur of shouting, from some distant place, away on the other side of the island. The shouting increased in volume, and presently it broke into a sort of deep chorus, which Cargunka recog-

Digitized by Google

nised to be the chorus of the "Fate of the *Laughing Sally*."

With a quick, extraordinary premonition of what all this portended, he ran across to the shore side of the vessel; and there, sure enough, in a few minutes he saw all his crew come down out of the woods, singing at the top of their voices, and escorting the steward in their centre, who had his arm round what might have been taken for a smallish man, dressed in a strange suit, made apparently of old ship's canvas. It was the hair, however, that told Cargunka it was indeed a woman; and the attitude of the joy-drunken steward made it very plain that the miracle had happened . . . that it was his "Agnes"—the phonograph contralto singer—that he had found somewhere hid on the island. Cargunka whooped madly, and raced round to where his small punt was made fast alongside. He leaped in, without a word to the others, and rowed ashore.

The men opened out for him, and stopped their singing. But the steward began to shout, at the top of his voice:—"It's her! It's her! I *knew* I'd find her!"

Cargunka pulled off his felt hat, and looked at the woman. He saw a pretty, piquant face, with clear, bright blue eyes, and the face extraordinarily sun-browned.

He held out his hand to her.

"The Almighty sure does wonderful things, Miss," he said, simply. "But I guess He never done a wonderfuller than this."

The girl was shaking and almost crying with excitement and joy. "Oh, yes, yes . . ." she began,

Digitized by Google

and forthwith began to cry outright, with sheer happiness and shock.

The one-time bartender held out a big hand to Cargunka, and the little man gripped it so hard that the big man winced.

"I thank God I met you, Sir," said the big man.

"My Oath!" said the little man, confusedly. "Same here."

CHAPTER VII

The remainder of this tale is soon told. The girl had been found in a small cave at the far end of the island (which is about seven and a half miles long). She had lived there in hiding all the three years, so as to keep out of the way of big old Captain Barstow, who had gone very definitely mad when he saw the vessel, carrying all his long-hoarded money, go down.

Once, when she had ventured down to the vicinity of the wreck, he had chased her for a couple of miles, screaming out mad oaths, and threats of what he would do, if ever he caught her there again. For the poor fellow, in his madness, could think of nothing but his gold, and suspected that she intended to rob him.

Often, she had watched him, from a distance, diving, diving, all day long. Indeed, she described him as seeming almost to live on the submerged craft; but whether he had ever succeeded in salving any of his gold she could not say.

In all the time on the island, there had not called

Digitized by Google

another vessel; and she had begun to feel that she might end her life there. She had grown to keep so much to her own little valley at the other end of the island, that she had actually known nothing of the arrival of the *Happy Return,* until the steward found her that morning out fishing from the rocks; and she admitted that it was possible there might have been another vessel to the island, without her knowing; but she thought it very unlikely, as she had not grown careless in watching until the latter months of her stay.

As regards the curious striking of the bell, and the attack on the bo'sun and Cargunka, these were obviously nothing more than the tricks of an obsessed mind, conceived and carried out with the characteristic cunning and remorselessness of the true monomaniac. It was plain that the last thing the madman had desired was visitors to the island. Possibly there had some other ship called in, and he may have adopted similar means to frighten them away.

As regards the money, a large part of this, amounting to over three thousand pounds, was found in the cave which the old Captain had inhabited. A careful search of the wreck led them to a second "find," under the cemented-down iron ballast, of which the barque carried a little for stiffening. It had been this, doubtless, that had kept the Captain diving hopelessly all those years; for it was possible to trace where he had made crazy, ineffectual efforts to shift the great, shaped masses of iron, under which, at some earlier period, he had obviously placed a portion of his wealth for safety.

An examination of the fo'cas'le head, and the

Digitized by Google

deck-house aft, showed how the Captain had managed to breathe, whilst *apparently* remaining under water; for the stairs that led down out of the poop deck-house (or chart-house) led down into the steward's pantry; and as the top of the house was always above water, the Captain had been able to obtain fresh air for as long as he liked, by simply rising to the surface of the water inside the deserted and closed-up deck-house.

In somewhat the same way, he had probably dived into the fo'cas'le, when he played the hanky-panky with the bell, hitting it probably with a piece of wood; for there was a quantity of imprisoned air (renewed each ebb) just under the perfectly air-tight deck of the fo'cas'le head.

CHAPTER VIII

Five days later, the *Happy Return* continued her voyage to 'Frisco, and Cargunka returned happily to his daily pleasures in the galley. This apparently puzzled the girl, Agnes Jensag, who knew him to be the "Owner"; but when she poked her head inside the galley doorway to ask whether she could not be of some use, Cargunka shook his head, and offered her a seat on the locker. He was peeling potatoes, and his pocket volume of Byron's Poems was propped up on the dresser before him.

"Wonderful man, Miss," said Cargunka, pointing at the book with his knife. He wiped his hand on his apron, and handed the book across to her, opened

Digitized by Google

at the frontispiece, which was an engraving of Byron himself.

"It's said by them as knows, to be remarkable like me, Miss," said Cargunka.

The girl flashed a quick glance at him, and understood.

"Yes," she said, gravely, "I can quite see what you mean;" which was strictly the truth, and, at the same time, pleased the little man tremendously.

"An' there's my legs, Miss, just the same wiv me as it was wiv 'im. An' the same leg, too," he told her, earnestly. "An' he was a fair divvil wiv the wimmin, too. . . ."

Cargunka realised that his tongue had run ahead a bit, and he changed the talk, by asking her whether she would mind singing him the ballade of "The Fate of the *Laughing Sally*." The girl smiled and did as he wished, singing in a low, sweet contralto, that made the little man lean back in ecstasy, with closed eyes, and set him beating a slow time with the potato knife. She sang right through to the last line:—

"And the bells grow faint and lost."

And Cargunka opened his eyes and stared silently away through the open door to leeward.

"And the bells of the *Laughing Sally* ring
And die away forever,"

he quoted, scarcely above his breath. "I reck'n it's gone eight bells wiv 'er for the last time. Aye!" He nodded vaguely astern. "Like as it'll be me an' one of the brigs one of these days. It's bound to

Digitized by Google

come to all of us. . . . At sea or in bed; As I have said. . . . You might put that rhyme down for me, Miss. My 'ands is wet. There's pencil an' my poetry-writin' book back of you on the shelf. I writes 'em down as they comes to me," he said simply.

Digitized by Google

D.C.O. CARGUNKA

THE ADVENTURE WITH THE CLAIM JUMPERS

"You don't come that over me, my lad!" said Cargunka, owner of the "Dot-And-Carry-One" Saloon, on the Water Front, San Francisco. "Eat your whack of the free lunch, and welcome; but if I catches you grub-stakin' your pockets, you'll get put out of here right smart!"

"I paid for three fifteen-cent drinks, ain't I?" demanded the man on the other side of the bar, in an aggressive voice.

He had been stuffing himself with cheese, ham, fish-rissoles, baked sausages, salmon cutlets and the like, from the Free Lunch Counter, which method of obtaining a meal was quite in order; but D.C.O. Cargunka had just caught him shoving a great hunk of cheese into his pocket, which action was very much out of order, running contra to the unwritten law of the Free Lunch Counter, which says:—"Eat what you like and as much as you like, provided you keep right on drinking; but what your stomach don't want, leave right there on the Free Lunch Counter."

Digitized by Google

It's a clear and simple and easily learnt law, this Law of the Free Lunch Counter; and the owners of drinking saloons uphold it grimly, and even lustily, if need be; for if they did not, considerable human derelicts would arrive, each with a sack and ten cents. The ten cents would go into a drink, and the contents of the Free Lunch Counter would go into the sack; and, in brief, that would be the end of the Free Lunch institution, which flourishes mightily in certain places, and most vigorously in little old San Francisco.

"You had three fifteen-cent drinks sure, my lad," said Cargunka; "but that don't entitle you to hump the Free Counter away on your back. You lug that cheese hunk out of your pocket, my son, or I'll come round and do it for you."

"You'll do what!" said the man, who was a great, husky, red-faced miner, just in from the North. "Ye——. Sure now will ye say that again, so I kin get yoor meanin', ye little dot-an'-carry galoot!"

It was quite evident that the man was a stranger to that part of the Water Front, or he might have been more careful in his choice of words.

"You got a good opinion of yourself, my lad, ain't you?" said D.C.O. Cargunka, his eyes shining a little. "You got a *mighty* good notion of yourself, ain't you?"

"I reck'n, ye little fool, I'll jest box yoor tabs for ye, if ye say another word," said the big man. "If ye was bigger, I'd shut my fist to ye; but I'm feelin' good, I am, an' I might spoil ye worse'n God spoilt ye, ye blame little cripple——"

Digitized by Google

It was the word "cripple" that did it. D.C.O. Cargunka jumped the bar, without even putting his hands on it, and the blow he hit the big man on the jaw was heard outside in the street.

The big man sat down violently, on the weighing machine, which happened to be directly behind him; but he was on his feet in a moment, and charged the short figure of Dot-and-Carry-One Cargunka, with a tremendous bellow of rage.

"I'll pull ye out to a man's size, like a putty figger, ye crippled toad!" he yelled, as he sprang at Cargunka, and made a huge, lunging swing at his head.

Cargunka circled to the side, on his dot-and-carry leg. His movements were astonishingly quick; and the difference in the length of his legs seemed to have no effect of slowing his speed. His foot-work was perfect, almost marvellous; for, without once guarding a blow with his arms, he side-stepped, and slid under, and slipped a dozen or more vicious punches from the big, furious miner. And all the time, as he side-stepped, slipped and evaded the man's great punches, he was never once driven outside of an imaginary four yard circle, around which the men in the bar had packed themselves in a breathless, shouting ring of mad excitement.

Suddenly, Cargunka stepped right in close to the big man, and drove in a one—two—three, bat! bat! bat! along the line of the short ribs. The big man let out a gasping yell of pain, as his head came forward. In the same instant, D.C.O. Cargunka loosed his right fist from somewhere about the vicinity of

Digitized by Google

his hip, and the upper-cut he sped home to the point of the big man's jaw was a truly terrible punch. The man's chin shot up, and his elbows and knees splayed in an absurd and helpless fashion; and down he came in his tracks with a crash, like the sound of a falling bullock.

As he fell, the double swing-doors of the saloon were thrown open, and a man jumped in through, with a drawn gun in his fist.

"Put that away, my lad, 'fore you get into trouble," said Cargunka, looking over his shoulder.

"Has big Buck Kessel come in here?" demanded the man, hoarsely. "Quick now; for I'm out for bad trouble! Has big Buck Kessel come in here? They told me, up the Front, as he was boozin' in here."

"Put your gun away, my lad," said D.C.O. Cargunka again, turning towards him. "This is 'Frisco, not Denver City!"

"Stow your dam gab!" snarled the man, looking at him fixedly for the first time. . . . "Say!" he continued, "ain't you D.C.O.?"

"That's me, my lad," replied Cargunka. "Put the popper away, an' I'll hear what's troublin' you."

The man lowered his gun, and began to explain, in an excited voice:—

"Say, D.C.O.," he said, "I've heard of you, up the coast. You're reckoned to be a guy as is always for a square deal. Well, you hark to me, an' then I guess if you're hiding yon brasted Buck Kessel, you'll hand the white-livered swine out for me to perforate.

Digitized by Google

"You hark to me, Sir! I just come down from up the coast. I been prospectin', an' I hit gold while I was up there. Yes, Sir! You bet I hit it big—big enough to mean no more work for yours truly.

"I pegged out my claim. It was on a bit of a creek, an' then I thought I'd just put in a bit of time, washing, up an' down the creek, before I come down here to register, an' let the news go loose, that'd fill that bit of a creek up with gold-hogs as full as a squaw is of hair-bugs.

"Like the brasted fool I was, I stretched my luck too far. When I got back to my claim, that afternoon, middlin' late, there was a crowd of hard-cases, maybe a dozen of 'em, down in the creek, up to their knees, washin' my pay dirt for their bloomin' lives. Yes, Sir! An' they'd jumped my claim, an' they'd staked out the whole of the two sides of the creek, as far up an' down as made it no use to me. What you got to say to that?"

There was a growl of sympathy from the men in the Dot-And-Carry-One Saloon, and Cargunka nodded.

"Go on, my lad," he said.

"Well," continued the man, "I was that mad, I'd have tried to buck Satan if he'd come along, an' I just lugged out my gun, an' told them there'd be blue murder if they didn't vamoose my claim, right then!

"Well, the next thing I knew, someone come up behind me, and I got a bash on the head. An' while I was down an' out, they took my gun *and* a

Digitized by Google

hundred and thirty ounces of dust and small nuggets, as I'd collected up an' down the creek. What you got to say to that?

"I did my damdest. I offered to toss 'em, or fight the biggest one of 'em—Anything for fair play; but they wasn't that kind. No, Sir! They wasn't!

"They shoved me in the creek, an' held me down, till I near drowneded; an' then did gun practice stunts all round me, till I reckoned I'd do well to get away with a whole skin.

"But, one of them, this here Buck Kessel that I'm gunning for, told 'em to tie me up. He said he'd get down here and file their claims. And afterwards they could let me go, and be damned to me or anything I could try to put over on 'em.

"Yes, Sir, they tied me up like a damn shote. An' that Buck swine let off for the South. But, Lord! they didn't know me! I rolled over to where there was a bit of rough quartz stickin' up, and I just frayed out the lashing they'd put on my arms. And then I got the stuff off me legs.

"They was all that busy, washing out *my* pay-dirt, they never thought to bother about me. And I crept in, up at the back of their tent, and sneaked a brace of guns (this here's one of 'em!). And then I lit out for where my horse was hobbled, in a little valley, about a half mile away.

"Well, I let out, hell for leather, to see if I couldn't come up on that Buck Kessel hog, an' do him in. But he'd got clean away from me. And when I got to the offices, they told me as he'd just taken out the

Digitized by Google

papers; and I was too late to do anything, 'cept lodge a complaint——A fat lot of use that, hey! Me on the one side, tellin' *my* yarn, an' a dozen of them on the other, tellin' theirs! An' them with the claims *and* their papers! An' every hour that passes, they'm liftin' my dust! Yes, Sir! *My* dust. Jehu sufferin' Jehoshaphat! *My Dust!* Now then, will you turn over that Buck Kessel swine to me, so I can perforate him so his own mother won't know him? The . . . the . . . the . . ."

"Come here, my lad," said D.C.O. Cargunka, beckoning to him.

The man came forward, a big rough, powerful chap he was, with a big honest-looking face.

"Now then, my lad," said Cargunka, as the man came up alongside of him. "Do you recognise the sleepin' beauty on the floor there?"

The man, Cargunka had knocked out, lay quiet enough to be dead. He had not been visible from the doorway of the saloon, because the weighing machine (that frequent adjunct of the bar) had stood between.

But now, as the newcomer set eyes on the insensible man, he let out a mad oath.

"That's the——!" he yelled, and without more ado he thrust his revolver down at the silent figure, crying out:—"To blazes with ye, ye rotten-hearted thief!"

The Dot-And-Carry-One Saloon boomed and echoed with the explosion of the heavy weapon, and there were shouts of horror and fright from the men in the bar.

Digitized by Google

But the man on the floor lay unharmed; for at the moment of the shot, Cargunka had struck the gunman's hand, so that the bullet had buried itself in the floor to the left of the insensible man. And now Cargunka was in the midst of a violent wrestling match, one abnormally long, enormously muscular arm being wound round the man's waist, while, with his right hand, he fought to wrench the gun away from the insanely angry prospector.

He succeeded at last in getting the revolver, and pitched it to one side. Then he bent the whole power of his short but amazingly muscular body to the conquering of this murder-mad newcomer.

Abruptly, the man weakened, curiously and unexpectedly; and before Cargunka knew what was happening, he had slid through his arms, into a quiet heap on the floor of the saloon.

"My Oath!" said Cargunka, breathlessly. "My Oath! What's that mean?"

He stared down suspiciously at the man, wondering vaguely whether it might not be some trick to catch him off his guard. Then, suddenly, he knelt on the floor, beside him, and felt his heart.

"My Oath!" he said, at last. "I b'lieve the poor devil's done out. He's starved or something, I'm thinkin'. Pass me over that whisky bottle, Bob" (this to the barman), "and I'll see what we can do wiv him. . . .

"When did you grub last, my lad?" were the first words Cargunka said, when the man came round.

"Blest if I know," he answered, getting somewhat giddily to his feet. "I been too busy to shunt grub.

Digitized by Google

I guess I'm needin' it; but I'm goin' to fill that hog up first; so you stan' clear!"

With the word, he stooped suddenly, and twitched a second gun out of the leg of his right boot.

But Cargunka was too quick for him. He nailed his wrist with one quick grip, and tore the gun out of his fist.

"You're sure lookin' for trouble, my lad," he said. "You darn fool. My Oath! What's the use of pluggin' him! That ain't the way to do anythin', 'cept a trip to the 'lectric chair. . . . Now you calm down, my lad, or you'll get rough-handled!"

This last, was in reply to a clumsy blow which the man had aimed at him, following an attempt to grab back the revolver, which Cargunka had just taken from him.

"You're mighty fresh, ain't you, damn you!" said the man, and aimed a second completely ineffectual blow at Cargunka's head.

"Here, Bob, and you, Andrews, hold this fool," said Cargunka. "I don't want to get hot an' hit him."

At this moment, there were several cries of:— "He's comin' to!" "The guy's openin' up." "Look out for his gun, D.C.O."

Cargunka looked round, and saw that Buck Kessel was trying to sit up.

"Sittin' up an' takin' nourishment, are you!" said Cargunka. "Well, I guess you'll try some other saloon, my lad, unless you wants me to let this gent loose on you wiv a gun!"

He jerked his elbow towards where the robbed

Digitized by Google

prospector stood, tugging away from the two barmen, Bob and Andrews. And Kessel had no sooner seen him, than it was plain he was very willing indeed to get the other side of the swing doors.

"It's plain he's labelled you, my lad, the same kind of rat-poison you are!" said Cargunka, staring at him, grimly. "My Oath! Get out! 'fore I lamn you. You make me sick. Get out!"

And the man went out, staggering; but with very considerable haste.

Cargunka turned:—

"Now, my lad, what's your name?" he asked the prospector.

"George Monkton," said the man.

"Well, Monkton, you an' me's goin' to have a little talk," said Cargunka. "Let him go, you two. Come along in here, George, my lad, and we'll get together on this business."

CHAPTER II

CARGUNKA was walking up and down his "office," as he called the room at the back of the bar.

As he walked, he limped, owing to his dot-and-carry-one leg, from which he had received his title of D.C.O.

George Monkton was sitting at the table, eating what Cargunka described as a scramble feed, which he had cooked for the man himself, on the oil stove which filled half of the end of the narrow room.

Digitized by Google

As Monkton ate, he talked between, and even during, mouthfuls.

"Say, D.C.O.," he was saying, "who's the guy in the wall-pic'cher? He sort of favours you. Say, it ain't you now, in fancy rig—eh?"

D.C.O. Cargunka beamed, literally; and his dot-and-carry limp became more pronounced, as he walked over to the picture and looked up at it.

"No, my lad," he said, ruffling his hair back from his shaven temples, "that ain't me; but most people as comes in here, gets thinkin' it is. That's Lord Byron, the poet. A fine lookin' man he was, my lad, don't ye think so?"

"Sure, I'd say he was some high-brow," agreed the man, Monkton.

"He'd a short leg an' a long one, same as me," continued Cargunka, looking self-conscious. "D'you ever read poetry, my lad?"

"G' Lor'! Not me!" said Monkton, with his mouth full. "Guess I ain't much on readin'-gadgets."

"Well you miss a deal," said Cargunka, solemnly; "a great deal, my lad. Now, if you've filled up proper, we'll light up, an' I'll make you a proposition. First of all, just where is this creek?"

"About seventy miles up the coast, an' about three inland," said Monkton. "The nearest place to it, is Alf Nebrech's, an' that's about fifteen miles to the West, I reck'n."

"Is there free water for a boat up to the pay-dirt?" asked Cargunka.

"Sure," replied Monkton.

Digitized by Google

"Then I reck'n I got a plan," said Cargunka. "One of my brigs, the *Happy Return*, is going up the coast next week, an' I reck'n we'll drop in on those jumpers, an' give 'em a look-in!"

"You'll sure need a mighty big posse with you," warned Monkton. "I tell you, D.C.O., they're bad men. They're gunmen that'd shoot up twice their crowd of plain diggers. You can't do nothin', b'lieve *me*!"

"Leave that to me, my lad," said Cargunka. "Are you game to back up my try, an' hold your mouth tight shut for evermore afterwards?"

"Sure!" said Monkton. "You show me a lead, an' I guess I'll follow. You can bet your boots on that. I'll follow you into hell an' out again, to get level with that crowd. You just show me a lead, D.C.O. That's all I asks."

"Well," said Cargunka, "I guess we'll fix the divvy right now. If I show you how to pull this thing, an' give you a hand, I'll halve up wiv you on what we get. How that look to you, my lad?"

"It looks good enough, I reck'n," said Monkton. "I'm on!"

"Well then, I'll sign you on as A.B.," Cargunka told him. "That'll look natural enough; an' I don't reck'n never to carry no idlers in my ship. No, my lad! I works myself, an' I expects others to work too."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

THE result of Monkton's faith in D.C.O. Cargunka was well justified; for ten days later, the *Happy Return* arrived off the place where the creek came down to the shore.

Cargunka was seated in his galley, peeling potatoes, when Monkton identified the mouth of the creek; and his Captain came forrard, to ask whether he should heave the brig to.

"I reck'n, Cap'n Gell," said Cargunka, "you should know my rules by this, seein' the times we've sailed together. When I'm cook, I'm plain cook, an' you're Cap'n; an' cook I am till the end of the first dog watch. What you got to do, you know blame well, seein' we talked it all out last night."

"Very good, Sir," said Captain Gell to his distinctly unorthodox owner, and immediately gave orders to heave-to, whilst Cargunka continued meditatively to peel spuds; and, between whiles, he read lines from his small pocket volume of Byron's Poems, which, as usual, was propped up on the low dresser before him.

It is difficult to analyse with exactness just why Cargunka, who, as I have remarked before, was a man of very considerable wealth, persisted in signing-on in his own vessel as cook.

Possibly, the reasons were varied. He had, as we know, an extraordinary mania for cooking, just as some men have an invincible desire to carpenter, or

Digitized by Google

to tinker with clocks, or to garden, and the situation afforded him every excuse to satisfy his natural tastes in this line. He certainly enjoyed cooking, as only the born *chef* can enjoy that troublesome art.

Also, it is possible that he liked the somewhat bizarre situation of occupying the position of cook, whilst he was, at the same time, owner of the vessel. Further, he saved the wages of a cook by doing the work himself. For, as he told Monkton, he carried no idlers in his ships; and was known to be as close in the matter of wages as any ship-Owner of them all. But, to make up for this, he certainly fed his crews magnificently; so well, in fact, that when it was known that he intended to make a trip, he could have his pick of sailormen for the voyage. This speaks for itself.

Later, in the second dog watch, D.C.O. Cargunka sat in the Captain's lounge chair on the poop, and talked:—

"No, Cap'n, we'll not go close in till well after dark. You got the name blacked out on the bow and stern?"

"Yes, Sir," said Captain Gell.

"Well, get the dingy cleared, an' fix up the rollocks an' the oars so they won't make no noise. I guess that'll be all. We'll lower her out here, and tow her in, so as not to have the sound of the falls squeaking, when we get close in-shore."

"Very good, Sir," said Captain Gell.

When Captain Gell returned from giving the orders, Cargunka was lying back, reading his favourite little volume of poetry.

Digitized by Google

"Ever read Byron, Cap'n?" asked Cargunka, lowering the book on to his knee.

"No, Sir, leastways not to remember," said Captain Gell, half absently.

"Wonderful man, Cap'n," said Cargunka, and stretched out his legs in front of him, surveying them earnestly.

"Queer thing, Cap'n, I should have a long an' a short one, ain't it—— A curious thing now, when you come to think that Byron was the same way." He hemmed, half self-consciously. "Have you ever thought as the likeness went any further, Cap'n?"

"Very like, Sir. Very like," said Captain Gell, with unconscious indifference; for he had answered similar questions a hundred times before, in the past years.

"A wonderful fine looking man he was, too," continued Cargunka. "And a fine athlete, too. . . ." He paused.

"Aye, Sir," said the Captain, and he spoke now with sufficient conviction to have satisfied even Cargunka. "Aye, you're surely a fine aathlete, Sir. A prettier one with the gloves, I never seen."

"It's strange as the finest bodies gets blemished, Cap'n," said Cargunka, softly. He stuck out his shorter leg and looked at it for a while, in silence. "And Byron they spoiled too, an' the same leg. . . . My word, Cap'n, but he was a proper fine lookin' man, too; an' a fair divvil wiv the wimmin. . . ." He hemmed again, self-consciously. "You'd not think, to look at me, as I was gifted that way, Cap'n, would you?"

Digitized by Google

"No, Sir, I would not," said Captain Gell, firmly.

Cargunka was silent, searching round for some way in which he could convey to the Captain the truth, without seeming to boast; but he could think of nothing at the time, and so fell to reading again.

"Send Monkton aft to me in the cabin, Cap'n," he remarked, some minutes later, climbing out of the Captain's chair, and thrusting the volume of poetry into his pocket.

"Very good, Sir," said Captain Gell, and walked forrard to the break of the poop, while Cargunka limped aft to the companionway, and so down the stairs into the saloon, where, in a few minutes, he was joined by Monkton.

CHAPTER IV

"Now, my lad," said Cargunka, reaching up to light the saloon lamp, for it was growing dusk, "I s'pose you can pull an oar; for I don't want to take no one else ashore wiv us in the boat. The less that's known about to-night's job, the better, I'm thinkin'."

"Sure," said Monkton. "I've used boats plenty."

"Well then, my lad," said Cargunka, "it's black faces we're having to-night. It's a proper disguise, an' it'll stop us loomin' up plain in the dark. Here! Rub it in well, down round your neck and ears. . . . That's the style!"

Cargunka had a great pot of black, greasy-looking stuff, which he first offered to the man, and then

Digitized by Google

dipped into himself; and so, in a very few minutes, the two of them were as black as a couple of buck niggers.

"Now," said Cargunka, "here's some waste to wipe your 'ands. And you'd best button your dungarees up over your chest and wrists. That's the thing! You won't show much now in the dark, I'm thinkin'. Shove these felt socks on over your boots. Got your gun?"

"Sure," said the big miner.

"Well, don't be in no hurry to use it!" replied Cargunka. "It ain't gun-work that's going to win out to-night. It's going to be just plain brains, my lad, an' quiet feet."

Yet, for all that Cargunka was so emphatic on this point, there reposed a hefty Colt automatic in the side pocket of his coat; which suggests that he was not entirely convinced, in his own mind, that the night's work that lay ahead of them, promised to be a completely peaceful affair.

Cargunka went into his cabin, and came out with a dungaree jumper and trousers and another pair of felt socks. He pulled on the thin blue trousers over his own, and then got into the jumper, which was loose enough at the bottom to allow him to get freely at his coat pockets. After this, he drew on the pair of felt socks, over his boots, as Monkton had done; and so the two of them stood ready for the adventure.

"Up on deck with you, my lad," said Cargunka, and picked up a small, dark-coloured sack, off the cabin table. There was something in the sack, which he

Digitized by Google

handled gently as he turned and followed Monkton up on to the poop.

"I guess this'll fix 'em right enough!" he muttered to himself, with a grim little laugh.

It was dark by now, and the barque's yards had been trimmed, and she was standing in for the vague shadow of the land. The wind was light, and the vessel made scarcely a sound as she ran through the water; whilst, fore and aft, not a light was visible.

Yet, so quiet was the night, that the faint creak, creak of the spars and gear (and even the low mutter of the crew's voices forrard) was plain to hear; but, except for these sounds, and the scarcely perceptible ripple of the water along the skin of the vessel, the night was just a quietness, through which came occasionally the slight noise of the water cheeping, cheeping, under the "entrance" of the clinker-built dingy towing astern; and somewhere, from far away under the dark shadow of the land, the low, hushed roar of the surf, making the quietness seem the more immense.

The land began to emerge out of the grey vague loom of shadow, into a black line, that grew ever more black and definite, whilst the faint surf murmur had become a low rolling sound, hollow and deep, under the black gloom of the land.

Presently, Captain Gell came up to Cargunka.

"We're as close in as is safe, Sir," he said. "I'll have to put the hellum up in a minute."

"Very good, Cap'n," said Cargunka, and went aft to the taffrail, where he unhitched the boat's painter, and hauled her up.

Digitized by Google

"Get in quiet, my lad," he said to Monkton, who got down over the side, forthwith, into the boat and began to ship the rowlocks.

"Hold the painter, Cap'n, while I get in," said Cargunka. "Hold her short, an' then give me the painter, as soon as I'm in. I don't want no splash."

This was done. The Captain released the painter quickly into Cargunka's hands, and the boat was suddenly alone on the ocean; for the barque had gone from them, into the surrounding darkness. Cargunka saw her a minute later, with her helm up, falling away, like a shadow ship, towards the open sea.

Then the two in the boat got out their oars, very quietly, and began to pull in towards the black cliffs of the coast-line, that stood up, high and gloomy, into the night.

As they drew in under the coast, the rolling grumble of the surf grew louder, and Cargunka, staring inshore, could see the white boil of phosphorescence showing vaguely, where the big slow swells burst into broken water over the coast rocks, along the bottom of the black cliffs.

Suddenly, Monkton burst into a loud laugh, as if some joke had just got home through his mental epidermis:—

"G' lor', D.C.O., what a lot of silly fools we are, sure, goin' tipsy-toesy like this! Why, I'd go the limit, they'd not hear a sound if we was to loose off our poppers, not with the row yonder!"

"Quit that!" said Cargunka, sharply, but speaking in a low voice. "What d'you suppose I'm troublin' about. I'm not worryin' about them hearin' me

Digitized by Google

ashore yon; as you ought to know, seein' as the shack's three miles up the creek, and round the bend, at that!

"You got to understan' my way of doin' a job, my lad, before you start thinkin' me a fool. I don't do nothin' wiv me eyes shut, not if I can 'elp it! I 'ad a scout up here, three days, last week, lookin' round. You'll find some s'prisin' changes ashore yon, when we gets up the creek, I'm thinkin'!

"An' you'll like to know, maybe, my lad, as the reason we're takin' all this trouble to keep quiet, is 'cause I learnt as there's some of 'em comes down the creek, an' out here, fishin'. There's Long Dan an' Jabez Vlum an' one or two others comes out here; an' I guess you should know as they're mighty quick-eared men. An' we ain't wanting anyone to come asking questions."

"Gee!" said Monkton. "What'd you think of that now! You're sure a smart man, D.C.O. But I don't sabe what them fur-shifters is doin' out here, fishin'?"

"You will, when we get up the creek a bit, my lad," said Cargunka. "It's close on a fortnight, since you was up this way. An' as soon as that friend of yours filed his papers, there was a proper rush up 'ere. You'll find they've got a small town spread up an' down the creek; an' fresh folk comin' in every hour, pretty near."

"Je-hosh!" said the big miner. "You sure got the wise head, D.C.O. I reckon I holds up my hands to you in the wise line. I——"

Digitized by Google

"Shsss!" muttered Cargunka. "Stop rowin'! Don't move!"

The two of them froze into instant stillness, whilst the boat moved ahead, though almost soundlessly, with the way that was yet on her. . . . "There, turn your head to the left!" whispered Cargunka. "About fifty fathoms off the starboard bow!"

The big miner saw then what Cargunka meant. Out there, indefinite almost as shadows, were two darker shapes upon the water, some hundred feet apart. They were canoes, and, as the two of them watched, straining their eyes, they saw the sway of a single figure in each, paddling gently. Then, the two canoes had passed on into the vagueness, and they could see nothing.

"Think they saw us, D.C.O.?" asked Monkton.

"I reckon not, my lad," replied Cargunka, "or we'd have had 'em singin' out to know who we was, I'm thinkin'."

"Not so sure!" muttered the big miner. "Maybe they saw us, an'll trail us in, to see what kind of outfit we is."

But Cargunka said nothing. He was staring inshore, searching the black cliffs and the phosphorescent gleam of foam at their base, for the mouth of the creek.

"I reckon that's her," he said, at last. "Pull!—— Quiet an' steady now!"

Ten minutes later, they had entered the mouth of the little creek, and all about them was the quiet of the stream, and the heavy, still smell of the earth, while the scent of the pine trees made a sweet balm in the

Digitized by Google

night air, with the pine-needles making a constant whispering in the darkness along the nearer bank, as a light wind stole down the great gully in which the creek ran.

CHAPTER V

Cargunka had brought the boat close in to the Northern bank, well under the shadow of the trees; for they had rounded the bend, and the new gold-town had jumped into view—a medley of minor lights, with, about half a mile ahead of them, where the creek swung round in a second bend, the blaze of two big gasoline flares; for already a drink saloon was in full blast.

Up and down the creek (or stream as it had become here; for they were getting now above the estuary) there were spread several dozens of all kinds of shelters—tents, shacks, and cabins; and there was a hoarse, far murmur of voices on the still night.

"Je-hosh!" said Monkton, amazed. "What'd you think of that now! If it ain't a proper rush! Say, D.C.O., it's like a merrickle! Why, it was all just wood an' water when I was here less'n a fortnight gone—just that an' them damned thieves campin' on my claim——"

He broke out into a spate of insane blasphemy, at the memory of all that he had lost, his voice going rawly across the quietness of the stream.

But Cargunka turned on him like a tiger:—

"Stow that, you fool!" he said. "A fine lump you

Digitized by Google

are to have wiv me. G' Lor'! I'd a done better to come alone! Cussin' won't 'urt that crowd. Ain't you got sense an' guts to know that, an' do your share to get square!"

"I'm blame sorry, D.C.O.," said Monkton. "I'm sure daft to let go like that; but it just got me goat proper, to be right here, an' know I should ha' been safe for life with the gold I'd 'a pulled out of that claim of mine."

"Maybe you'll not do so bad after all, my lad," said Cargunka. "That's your claim, ain't it—away over to the right there, wiv the big-built cabing on it?"

"Sure," said the miner. "I guess you don't need me to show you round, D.C.O. I reck'n I built that, on me lonesome, before they come along. I'd reckoned I'd winter here. . . . Hell! What's the use of talkin'! What you goin' to do, anyhow, D.C.O.?"

"We'll pull up a bit higher," said Cargunka; and the two of them took to their oars again, keeping well over on the North side of the stream; for there were no buildings on that bank, until near the bight of the second bend, where the big gasoline flares blazed in front of the drink saloon.

"Ease a little!" said Cargunka, as they came opposite to the open doorway of the log-hut that stood at the top of the Southern bank, on the edge of Monkton's claim. "Easy wiv your oar. Back! I'm goin' to shove 'er in 'ere. . . . That's right! In wiv her. Catch one of them branches an' hold on while I gets the glasses."

They had put the dingy in under the shadow of

Digitized by Google

a far out-reaching pine bough; and Monkton held the boat in place, whilst Gargunka drew in his oar quietly, and reached into his locker for his night-glasses.

With these, he began now to examine the cabin opposite. The distance was about a hundred and fifty feet; but the glasses showed the interior of the shanty with wonderful clearness, with the men sitting round a big packing-case, for a table.

"Lord!" said Cargunka, after staring a bit. "It couldn't be better. They'm playin' (poker I reck'n) an' they got the stuff on the table there. . . . Piles of it. You take a look, my lad, an' see if that don't do you good. I'll hold the boat. You pull your oar in quiet, or it'll go adrift."

Monkton pulled in his oar, silently; and put the glasses to his eyes; then he swore.

"Quit that!" said Cargunka.

"There's sure hundreds of ounces on the table, right now," said Monkton, in a strange voice. "Hundreds an' hundreds. . . . An' they got a lot of it in hundred ounce bags. By the size, that's what I reck'n them are. Say, what you think of that now! That's my dust—— Say——!"

"Hold tight an' keep the stopper on, my lad!" said Cargunka, under his breath. "I guess the more the better."

"Say, D.C.O., how you goin' to shape to touch all that?" asked the big miner, after a further look through the glasses. "There's six of 'em in there. An' don't you make no error! Them's bad men—— They're killers, an' they got their guns right handy,

Digitized by Google

as you can sure see. Say, d'you reckon we can shoot 'em up from outside, an' then rush the stuff?"

Cargunka laughed a little, under his breath.

"You'll see, my lad, when the time comes," he said. "We got a deal to do yet though, I'm thinkin'. Hand me back them glasses. We're goin' up stream a bit to scout round, an' make sure we ain't goin' to get disturbed. Ship your oar quiet now, an' pull careful."

They went up stream for another couple of hundred yards; then Cargunka put the boat across to the South bank, and told Monkton to stand-by her, ready to shove off, whilst he went up the bank, and took a look round.

Yet, he found, as he had hoped, that there seemed to be no one knocking about. The nearest shanty (a wretched little lean-to of packing-cases and sacking) was, however, lit up, and Cargunka thought he would take a look in. He walked quietly over to it, and found that the sacking curtains which apparently occupied the place of a door, were half looped back, and he could look in.

Somewhere, farther up the stream, probably in the saloon, there began the metallic rant of a phonograph:—

"Oh, she wasn't goin' to stand it on her lone,
On her own,
No, by Joan!
She wasn't goin' to stand it on her own!"

"That's a dam rotten instrument!" said Cargunka to himself; but it was evidently "good enough," for

Digitized by Google

a voice in the lean-to, took up the song, drunkenly, in a tremendous bass roar :—

"Oh, she washn't goin' ter sthan' it on'er ownsh!"

And under cover of the roar of sound, Cargunka stole up, and peeped in.

He found two very drunk men sitting at an Armour's canned meat box, trying to play cards; but though this was amusing enough, in its way, the thing that attracted Cargunka's attention, was the amount of the stakes, which they were risking drunkenly on simple nap hands.

"I guess this here's a rich strike, right enough," he muttered, and leant forward to get a better view. At that instant, the bigger of the two men looked up, and gave out a yell :—

"A blimy nigger, s'elp me!" he said, "or I got the jim-jams!"

But before the second man had time to turn round, Cargunka had pulled back into the shadow; and he left the man to decide the nice point, to his own satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI

"All clear now, my lad, for runnin'," he told the big miner, five minutes later. "Shove 'er off!"

He let the boat drift down stream silently, past the cabin that stood on Monkton's claim.

About a hundred yards below the shanty, he beached the nose of the boat gently, and made the painter fast to a spike of rock.

Digitized by Google

"Come along, my lad, step quiet," said Cargunka. "Pass me out that sack, gently now! That door opens outward, don't it? That's what my scout told me."

"Sure," said the miner. "I hung her myself. And I should know, if anyone does!"

"I don't doubt it," said Cargunka. "I never did. The chap as scouted for me, knows it don't pay none to tell me any fudge news. Now, I guess we got to hunt up a good hefty log an' bring it along. There'll be plenty around, I'm thinkin'. I guess we'll sample the wood-pile. My scout said they'd a good heap of timber stacked away at the back of the shanty. This looks like there's goin' to be two niggers in the wood-pile, in a way of speaking! I wish t' goodness yon damned phonygraft would shut that rotten noise!"

Yet, as it chanced, the far away rant of the phonograph proved useful enough to Cargunka and the miner; for it was screeching out again the same inane jargon:—

"Oh, she wasn't goin' to stand it on her lone,
On her own,
No, by Joan!
She wasn't goin' to stand it on her own!"

And the men in the big log-hut, took it up in a hoarse roaring chorus:—

"Oh, she wasn't goin' to stand it on her lone——"

"Now, my lad . . . while they're makin' that noise!" muttered Cargunka, and ran quickly and quietly round to the back of the heavily built hut, with Monkton following.

Digitized by Google

"Here we are," whispered Cargunka. "Step easy! Lift your end!"

He slipped the bight of the small sack, he was carrying, between his teeth.

"Now!" he grunted, softly, through his clenched teeth. "Up wiv her!"

The two of them lifted a heavy pine-log from the wood pile, and began to carry it noiselessly round to the front of the shanty, near to where the heavy-timber door was standing open.

"Let her rest on her end a mo," said Cargunka.

They rested the log, and Cargunka took the bight of the small sack out of his mouth, for a breather.

"We got to carry her close up to the door; an' then I've a present wiv me, as I'm goin' to heave in, gratis, my lad," said Cargunka. "Then it'll be shut the door smart, an' I'll give you a hand to get the log propped solid against it. After that, there'll be some artillery play, I reck'n. If there is, I guess we'll 'ave to move extra smart, before there's a crowd!"

"Now, we'll get going again."

With infinite pains and caution, they carried the log nearer, and poised it on its end, just at the back of the open door.

Cargunka had been carrying the little sack in his teeth again. Now, he opened it, and lifted out a large glass winchester, filled with some fluid. He took the big bottle by the neck, and swung it, once, twice, and let it fly in through the open door, where it shattered to fragments against the opposite wall.

In the same instant, he caught the door, and dashed it shut.

Digitized by Google

"Now," he gasped, in a low quick voice, and the two of them hove the heavy log nearer, and let the upper end of it fall with a thud against the outer side of the door, wedging it immovably.

"Drop!" said Cargunka; and the two of them went flat down on their faces, just as a spate of cursing, broke out within, following the instant of curious silence that had ensued after the throwing of the bottle. The next moment, there came a volley of revolver shots, ripping through the planking of the door; and a good thing it was for the two of them, that Cargunka had thought in time to "lie low."

Directly afterwards, there came shrieks—curious, breathless, gasping shrieks, and a loud, violent thudding against the door; and then, incredibly, an intense silence.

"What was it, D.C.O.?" asked the miner, in a somewhat awed voice. "What did you give 'em?"

"Ammonia!" said Cargunka. "They're stiff for a time, I guess; but they'll come round with fresh air. Up with you, my son, and get the door open. No, you've nothing to be afraid of. There's no room for playing possum, with all that stuff in their lungs."

They rose to their feet, and hove the log away from the door. Cargunka pulled the door open, and found that something or someone had extinguished the lamp. Yet he did not pause. He whipped open the mouth of his small sack, pulled something out and fitted it over his mouth and nose; then, with the sack in his hand, he shut his eyes and strode over a silent body into the hut. He felt for the table; touched it; and swept heap after heap of the small,

Digitized by Google

heavy lumps of metal into the stout fibred sack. As he worked, in spite of his respirator, he gasped dizzily with the fumes of ammonia that still pervaded the shack; though the night air was blowing into the hut.

He cleared the table in ten seconds, and felt all over it, to make sure that no gold remained. As he reached over, his toe stubbed against something soft and heavy. He stooped for it, and felt a small, buck-skin sack, about nine inches high, by three in diameter, which was leaning against the side of the big packing-case, where it had slid down, in the brief riot, after the throwing of the bottle.

He got down on to his hands and knees, fumbling round on the floor, and avoiding the insensible men, more by sense than sight. Three times, he came upon small bags of the dust; and he scraped up a double handful of fallen nuggets, cramming all, as he found them, into his sack.

Abruptly, as he groped, he heard a man sigh, and then someone stirred, and sat up, questioning. Another man moved; and another voice broke out confusedly into query, coughing and stuttering. Cargunka began to back slowly towards the door, keeping near the ground so as not to be seen against the vague loom of the open doorway. He had the sack of dust in his arms.

Suddenly, a man's voice bellowed the words:—

"The dust! Collar the dust! There's some tough in the shack! Light the lamp!"

There came a chorus of shouts, coughings and gaspings, as the men all about in the darkness, began to

Digitized by Google

recover; and then, like thunder, in that small shanty, the bang of a heavy revolver.

"The door's open. Watch the door!" shouted the man again. He was evidently one of those in the bunks; and Cargunka heard him leap with a heavy thud to the ground. There came the scrape of a match; but already Cargunka was at the door, still creeping. He backed out, swiftly; just as the match flared. Then he was with Monkton, who had stayed at the door, as Cargunka had bid him. He dumped the small sack heavily on to the ground, and jumped at the door.

"Now," muttered Cargunka, and with one movement, they crashed-to the door, and let the log fall back against it, jamming it firmly. Cargunka caught his companion, and dragged him out of a line with the door, just as a perfect storm of revolver-shots broke out, inside, and the bullets burst through and through the door. Cargunka lifted the sack, and tied the mouth of it with both method and speed.

"Down to the boat," he said. "Catch hold!"

The shooting continued as they ran; and from higher up the river bank, there broke out a loud shouting in the still night. There were fresh shouts; and then the noise of feet running. And, all the time, the shooting and pounding continued inside the hut.

Cargunka and Monkton kept on the steady run. They carried the small canvas sack between them, by its two strong, rope grommets; and it weighed so heavily, that they staggered in the darkness, breathless, as they ran.

Behind them, the shouting grew louder. It seemed

Digitized by Google

as if the whole of the inhabitants of the new "rush" town had been roused by the persistent shooting, and were arriving at a run.

"Leg it, my lad! Leg it!" said Cargunka, grimly through his teeth, as the bigger man seemed to slacken his pace under the enormous strain. "It'll be a quick lynch party if we're caught!"

The big miner's stride quickened at the remark, and as it did so, there came a dull heavy thud, of a falling log, away behind them.

"They've unbottled 'em!" muttered Cargunka. "Now look out for squalls. Down here. Leg it, my lad! Leg it! . . . Where the devil's the boat!"

The shooting had ceased now; and there was a hoarse murmur of talk, and shouted questions and threats.

Then a voice, a huge drunken voice, that Cargunka recognised:—

"It weren't th' jim-jams! It weren't th' jim-jams! It were sure a nigger! Look around fer a nigger, b'ys. Hic! I seen 'im! Sure, don't the dawg niff 'im! Foller-on! Foller-on, Billy! Foller 'im!"

There ensued a babel of questions and further shouted talk; and then, just as Cargunka located the vague outline of the dingy, in the darkness, there was a shout of:—"Get pine knots, boys, an' try down stream, after Sandy's dawg. Coom along!"

Cargunka and Monkton came to a clumsy stop at the bows of the boat.

"Now," said Cargunka, huskily, "together!" And they swung the enormously heavy little sack of gold in over the bows.

Digitized by Google

"In wiv you, my lad!" said Cargunka; and ran to cast off the painter from the spike of rock.

"Cut it!" gasped out Monkton, who had tumbled himself heavily into the boat. "Cut the darn thing!"

"Get them oars out an' don't talk silly!" said Cargunka. "We ain't leavin' no cloos this trip; not if I knows it!"

The crowd of miners was now racing down-stream towards them, along the top of the river bank. They were carrying a number of flaring pine-knots. In front of everyone, a big man was running, staggering drunkenly from side to side, and holding a blazing torch above his head with one hand, whilst with the other he held the end of a long piece of old lariat. The piece of lariat was made fast to a big, pointed-eared wolf-dog, which was running along the top of the bank, with its nose close to the ground, tracking them without a whimper.

Cargunka gave just one comprehensive look, as he cleared the painter hitch. As he did so, there came the loud bang of a heavy six-shooter behind him, and the big wolf-dog flung itself up suddenly on its hind legs, its front legs pawing crazily at the air. Then it fell over on its back, kicking madly for an instant, and afterwards lay still.

"I guess that pup don't smell us out none again," said Monkton's voice, as Cargunka whirled round towards the boat, with the painter loose in his fist.

The racing crowd of men had come to an almost instantaneous halt, and there was an extraordinary moment of complete silence. Cargunka could even

Digitized by Google

hear the sharp, bubbling, resinous spluttering of the burning pine-knots.

"You damned fool!" he said, in a fierce whisper to Monkton, as he put his shoulder against the bow of the dingy, pushed off, and jumped smartly in over the bows.

And in that instant, the crowd which had halted in that strange immediate silence about the suddenly slain dog, came to life again.

A tremendous crash of revolver-fire broke the night; and hundreds of bullets splashed into the water all about them, with ugly, hissing plop-plop-plop sounds, as the crowd fired in the direction from which the shot had come.

"Pull, you fool!" said Cargunka. "See what you got us in for, wiv your dam silly ways! Pull!"

The crowd was charging down bodily now, towards where the boat had been moored, and the shooting had eased temporarily; for most of the weapons were empty. But, already, Cargunka and Monkton were ripping the dingy down-stream with fierce strokes; so that when the crowd reached the place where the boat had been, they were a good couple of hundred yards away, and going well with the current.

"Was you reckoning we'd look better as sieves, than the way we was born an' made?" said Cargunka, over his shoulder. "We'd 'a' got away wivout a shot, if you hadn't 'a gone an' done that dam silly game! What was you thinkin'?"

"I don't reckon to have no dawgs put to trackin' me, like as if I wer' a bloomin' criminal!" said the big man, in a grim half-sulky voice.

Digitized by Google

Cargunka laughed, suddenly.

"You got spunk, my lad, all right!" he said; "but God didn't mean you to run to brains, I'm thinkin'! Pull!"

CHAPTER VII

The dingy was round the bend now; and Monkton thought the chase was done; but Cargunka guessed better.

"They'll cut across the bend!" he said, "an' head us off, if we ain't mindin'. We got to pull our insides out to stop 'em!"

And he was right; for, suddenly, a clamour of shouting broke out ahead; and, turning on his thwart, he saw the flicker of torch-light, among the pine woods away on the port bow of the dingy.

"Pull!" he muttered, and bent his muscular back to a still greater effort.

The boat shot past the threatening part of the river-bank, just as the first of the crowd of men burst through into the open space, on the river-side. The flicker of the torches shone out over the water, and showed them, vaguely, on the fringe of the light.

"Got 'em!" yelled several voices; and a splatter of gun-fire broke out. But hard running through dark pine woods, by torch-light, is not conducive to good shooting, and the two in the boat passed out of range, into the darkness upon the river, without being hit; though the boat had been struck several times.

Yet the crowd was not minded even now to give up; but began to run after them, along the bank, in a

Digitized by Google

determined fashion; though they seemed unable to overhaul the dingy.

"We're leavin' 'em!" gasped Monkton, at last. . . . "Leavin' 'em sure! They won't be able to run far, when we gets out on the big water!"

"Hold your wind, my lad, an' pull," said Cargunka, between strokes. "We, maybe, got the worst to come. You remember them two canoes! . . . We ain't got to be followed an' located; an' that's what they'll do, if we don't drop this bunch, before we hit the briny. . . . Them two in the canoes 'll come monkeying round; an' I'm not out for any killin'. It ain't my way. It's ugly an' it ain't Christianlike. . . . You pull, my lad!"

The dingy moved fast under their tremendous efforts, and the current helped them all the time. Astern of them, on the South bank, there were the bobbing lights of the many torches, and odd shouts, with now and again a crash and a curse as some man caught his foot and tumbled headlong.

The shooting had ceased entirely; for the boat was quite out of sight of the chasing crowd, and they were making far too much noise to hear the muffled oar-roll of the padded oars in the rowlocks.

But with all their efforts, Cargunka and the big miner could not lose the men who were after them; for the boat was never more than some three hundred yards ahead, at any period of the mad chase, and Cargunka was thinking all the time of the two canoes that were somewhere ahead, in the mouth of the creek's estuary.

Some of the men in the crowd astern, were sure

Digitized by Google

to know that a couple of the camp "providers" had come down the estuary, and the torchlight was certain to bring the men in the canoes up to see what was happening. That was, possibly, what the miners were counting on. And Cargunka knew that if the men they had seen in the canoes, took a hand in the chase, it would mean gun-fighting.

"We'm there, D.C.O.!" gasped out Monkton, suddenly, after taking a look over his shoulder. "Now we'll lose 'em!"

"Lose nothin', my-lad!" said Cargunka, as the boat rode out into the open sea. "Look astern! That'll bring them canoes up, in mighty quick time."

The thing that Cargunka was pointing to, was the flaring blade of the torches, as the miners rushed out of the wood, and down on to the shore at the mouth of the estuary, where they began to shout, and wave their torches.

From somewhere over the sea, came a loud "cooee," sounding strange and hollow, in all that immensity.

"There you are, my lad!" said Cargunka, in an I-told-you-so voice. "Now we got to handle that!"

"Well," said Monkton, "ain't I got me gun on me! Je-hosh! but I'd like to perforate some of 'em. I bin shot over a deal to-night."

"Hark to that," said Cargunka, ignoring the big miner's grumble; for a great voice, the drunken voice of the big man who had been so relieved in his mind about the nigger, came booming out across the ever-widening gap of water:—

"Stop 'em, Buck! . . . Buck Kessel! . . . Buck

Digitized by Google

Kessel, stop 'em! . . . Ahoy, Buck, perforate 'em. They got your pardners' dust."

"Je-hosh!" said Monkton, "I guess that was sure that Buck swine that was in one of them canoes. I'll sure perforate him for keeps, if he's the nerve to get in my track!"

"Keep her moving good-oh, my lad," said Cargunka. "We don't want to be too near in, when the fun starts."

"Buck Kessel!" came the great voice again from the beach, sounding clear through the boom of the surf on the shores to the North and South. "Buck Kessel! Stop 'em. They got your pardners' dust. Fill 'em up with lead."

And then, suddenly, Buck's voice ringing across the sea, from somewhere on the port side of the boat:—

"Sure! I'm after 'em!"

"There's two of 'em!" came the great voice from the shore. "We've shot away all our lead. Plug 'em, Buck! Try the duck-gun on 'em!"

"Sure!" shouted Buck's voice, out of the darkness.

"Duck!" said Cargunka, and the two of them ducked their heads below the gunnel, pulling their oars in-board, just as a heavy gun roared out, from a short distance away on their port side.

There was a screaming hiss of shot all about them, and the side of the boat sounded as if it had been struck by a sudden gust of the largest and most vigorous kind of hail.

"He's peppered the boat proper," said Cargunka. "I guess we don't want that to happen again, when

Digitized by Google

he's any nearer, or it's going to punch the side of the boat out."

"Sure!" said Monkton, and the two of them pulled out their guns.

As they did so, the voice of Buck Kessel sounded again, apparently not more than some sixty yards away.

"I guess that peppered ye! I'll fill ye up solid with lead if ye play any hanky on me! You turn right around now, and pull for the shore."

As he spoke, Monkton loosed off his revolver at the sound, once, twice, and, at the second shot, there was a little cry of pain from out of the darkness, and then a brutal spate of threats and cursing.

"Down!" said Cargunka, sharply, and caught Monkton by the collar, and dragged him into the bottom of the boat. In the same instant, the big duck-gun roared out again, and the crash of the heavy duck-shot on the side of the boat was sickening. Several of the shot passed clean in through the side, and drove dangerous splinters of the hard wood in all directions, so that the two of them were bleeding in half a dozen places; but not really harmed.

"That got ye! I'll teach ye, ye damned thieves—I'll——"

But what further lesson, Mr. Buck Kessel wished to instil, was not told; for both Monkton and Cargunka emptied their guns at the sound of his voice, firing low, so as to avoid killing him, if possible.

There came an ugly scream from out of the night, and then an absolute silence, broken presently by the sound of a paddle out in the darkness. There was

Digitized by Google

a further space of silence, and then again the splash of a paddle, but further away.

"He ain't hit bad!" said Cargunka; "but I guess he's bad enough. He's off! Now, out oars, my lad, and maybe we'll pick the ship up before yon other chap comes foolin' round."

They pulled out into the open sea for ten minutes; and were getting well away from the shore, when suddenly Cargunka threw a low word or two over his shoulder:—

"We're bein' stalked, my lad," he said. "Watch the little twiddles of phosphor-light astern there in the water. That chap can use a paddle pretty good. He ain't making no noise—not as much as you would if you winked, my lad. I reckon that's the other canoe."

"There's the ship, away yon," said Monkton. "Maybe, if we tried, we could rush yon guy before he guessed we was wise to him. Then I reck'n we could fill him bang up to his back teeth with lead; an' we'd be right then to make our get-away, an' no one to know where we'd gone."

"Pull, my lad," said Cargunka. "I'll fix him in a bit."

He stood up and slipped off his coat.

"Now, my lad," he said, "take the two oars an' keep on pullin'; but don't sweat yourself, an' when you 'ear me whistle, come back for me."

He reached behind him, as he spoke, and pulled out his belt-knife. Then, with this in his hand, he caught the stern of the dingy, and lowered himself, without a word further, into the sea.

Digitized by Google

"Well, what 'd you think of that!" muttered the big miner. But he obeyed orders, listening intently, and staring hard at the faint whirling of the phosphorescence in the water, some twenty fathoms astern, where the unseen paddle plied silently in the almost complete blackness. And somewhere, as Monkton guessed, between the canoe and the boat, Cargunka trod water quietly, and waited, knife in hand.

Less than a minute later, there was a sudden yell, astern, and then a loud splash. And still Monkton pulled on, stolidly.

A minute passed, during which odd sounds came to him, vague splashings, and once a desperate gasping; and finally there was only a very complete silence; broken presently by the slight sounds of someone swimming.

Then a whistle.

Monkton put the boat round, instantly, with savage strokes, and pulled back.

"Way 'nough!" said Cargunka's voice, softly, out of the darkness, ahead. Then, in a minute, Cargunka was climbing aboard, dripping prodigiously.

"Did ye knife him?" asked Monkton, as Cargunka took his oar again, and bent his back once more to pulling.

"Not me, my lad," said Cargunka. "I ain't built blood-thirsty, like you. I capsized the canoe. We 'ad a bit of a scrap in the water, an' then I cut a tidy lump out of her side. He'll be too busy wiv this an' that to do any more stalkin' this night, I'm thinkin'."

Digitized by Google

For the first time since Cargunka had known him, the big miner laughed.

"Je-hosh!" he said. "I'd sure have liked to see the boob get his head wet."

Half an hour later, they were safely aboard the brig.

CHAPTER VIII

THE following day, as usual, Cargunka took up his duties as cook. But that evening, as was his custom, he went aft, in the second dog watch, to enjoy the coolness of the weather side of the poop, and the comfort of Captain Gell's deck-chair.

"You know, Cap'n," he might have been heard explaining presently, "I've often thought as this dot-and-carry-one leg of mine was give me as a kind of set-off against me other gifts. I dare bet that was 'ow it was wiv Byron. Think what he might have been, if the Almighty hadn't put the break on him, as you might say. An' even then, the ladies worshipped him. Look at me, too, Cap'n; you mightn't think it to look at me——"

"No, Sir," said Captain Gell, firmly, for the second time in this story. . . . "What was all them lights ashore last night, Sir?" he added.

"Them," said Cargunka, still turning over in his mind how to convince the Captain of his perpetual error of opinion, without having to descend to crude self-flattery, "them, oh, I guess them was a torchlight procession as they was havin' ashore yon. . . . It was a s'prisin' pretty sight, Cap'n."

There was a little touch of vicious pleasure in his

Digitized by Google

voice, at the look of silent unbelief in Captain Gell's eyes.

"You're an obstinate old Jew, Cap'n," he said, and sighed a little. . . . "Sing out for Monkton to come aft to me in my cabin."

And there, some minutes later, Cargunka shared out the gold, in the proportion of "half to you" and "half to me."

"Did you ever hear of Byron, the poet?" he asked, in an earnest voice, as he concluded the division.

"Sure, he's the poetry guy, D.C.O.," said the big miner. "Didn't you tell me about him yourself?"

Digitized by Google

WE TWO AND BULLY DUNKAN

"DON'T go, Miles," I said. "Better lose your pay-day. It seems he's got it in for you, and a common sailorman can do nothing against the after-guard."

"I'm going back, John," he told me. "I swore he'd not haze *me* out of the ship, and he shan't. He's belted the rest of the crew half silly, and they've bunked, without drawing a penny. Some of the poor devils even left their sea-chests. I expect he thinks I'm going to do the same; but he's mightily mistaken."

This was in 'Frisco. I had just run up against Miles, who had a badly swollen face, and an ugly scar over his right eye-brow.

"What is it?" I'd asked him. "Been a trip with a Yankee Skipper?"

"Just that, John," he answered me. "Bully Dunkan!"

"Goo' Lor'!" I said. "Were you drunk when you signed on?"

For no free, sober white-man ever sails with Bully Dunkan, not unless it's that or the hard and stony beach. That is just what it had been with poor old Miles; and he'd had a Number One rough time of it; for once, when he explained that he misliked the application of the Mate's heavy sea-boot to his rear anatomy, the Mate had promptly knocked him down,

Digitized by Google

having first slipped a big brass knuckle-duster on his fist, to emphasise his accompanying and entirely unprintable remarks. This accounted for the scar over my old shipmate's eye.

The swollen face had been acquired at a later late; to be exact, about a week before the ship reached 'Frisco. It was what I might describe as the lingering physical memory of an efficiently dislocated jaw. The dislocation had been the personal and vigorous handiwork of Bully Dunkan himself. It appears that Miles, one afternoon, so far forgot his early training as to withhold the other cheek, during one of the Mate's attentive moods. In fact, I understand that Miles actually hit the man (Hogge by name and nature) so hearty a wallop with his first, that he floored him on the maindeck. The next thing that poor Miles knew was, as he put it, stars. Old Bully Dunkan had come up behind him, wearing felt slippers, and hit him solidly with his first, on the side of the jaw.

Bully Dunkan weighed two hundred pounds, in his stockings, and his title isn't a fancy one. So when Miles came round, in about ten minutes, and found the bosun and Chips, the carpenter, trying to heave his jaw back into place, he wasn't surprised; but, as he told me, it hurt a lot; which I could believe, by the look of the swelling!

"Well," I told him, "you're a fool, if you try to make the trip back to Boston in her. He'll have it in pretty savage for you."

Miles, however, is a pig-headed brute, when he's fixed on anything; so when he just shook his head, I told him I would sacrifice my bones on the altar of

Digitized by Google

friendship, and sign on for the return trip with him, just to look after him a bit!

"John," he said, in his solemn, earnest kind of way, "you're a friend to tie to. And I'll not try to persuade you not to come—not until you've heard the rest of what I've got to tell you:—

"When we were coming up from Sydney, through the Islands, the Old Man and the Mate went ashore one night in the boat. I was one of the boat's crew, and a chap, called Sandy Meg, was the other.

"We were told to stay by the boat, and lie just off the shore a bit. I thought it was a rummy business; and ugly too; for both the Skipper and the Mate had guns. They were loading them in the boat, while we were pulling ashore.

"Well, they'd been ashore about an hour, I should think, when Sandy Meg nudged me to listen. I heard what he meant, then; for there was a faint, far-off screaming, seeming about a mile or more away; and then there were several shots. I could swear to that.

"'What do you make of it, Sandy?' I asked him; but he shook his head, and wouldn't answer. Poor devil; they had fairly beaten the bit of spirit out of him. Not that he was ever very wise.

"About half an hour later, I heard someone running, up among the trees; and then I saw the Mate and the Captain coming down to the beach at a run, and singing out to us to bring the boat ashore, smart.

"They fairly raced down the sands, and I could see they were carrying a packet between them; pretty heavy it seemed, and done up in some of that native matting. They hove this down into the bottom of

Digitized by Google

the boat; and I swear it sounded like coin, packed tight. Then they shoved her out and scrambled in, yelling to us to give way, which we did, with the two of them double-banking the oars, and driving her out stern-first.

"We'd got out about three hundred yards, when a man came out of the woods, and ran down the shore, a white man, by the look of him in the moonlight; but, of course, that's half guessing. He knelt down near the edge of the water, and then there was a flash, and something knocked splinters off the port gunnel of the boat, and there was the bang of one of these old Martinis. I recognised the sound!

"By the time he'd loaded and fired twice more, we were too far away to get hurt. He never touched the boat, after that first shot. I saw several other men on the shore; but I suppose they can't have had anything to shoot with.

"Then we were heading away for the ship—she looked like a ghost out on the sea; too far away for the people ashore to recognise anything about her.

"Next day, when I was sent up to lace on the boat-cover, I saw something in the bottom, that made me stare. When I'd reached for it, I found it was a twenty dollar gold piece. You'll remember the package they dumped into the bottom of the boat! Now what do you make of all that?"

"Ugly!" I said.

"Well," he told me, "*that's* one more reason why I'm going home to Boston in her. I've to get square for these" (he touched the scar and his jaw) "and I reckon the best way to get square with hogs of that

Digitized by Google

kind, is to touch them right on their dollar-marks. Now, are you strong to come, as ever?"

"Stronger," I told him. "Only I guess we'll go heeled. There's sure to be some excitement coming to us this trip. Tell me, where is the lazarette trap—in the pantry, or in the big cabin?"

"Neither," said Miles. "Bully Dunkan sits on the grub hatch, as they say! The hatch of the lazarette is in his own cabin, and opens up under his table. It's no good thinking of that, John. And there's no getting in through the lazarette bulkshead, from the hold. She's stowed up with cargo, solid to the deck-beams. I've thought of all that. I've thought of things for hours at a time; but I can't see how to do it!"

"He drinks pretty heavily, doesn't he?" I asked.

"No," said Miles, "not for him, you know. I've never seen him stupid with it yet. And he sleeps so light, that we always have to go to the wheel on the port side of the poop. His cabin is on the starboard side, and he comes up raging, if anyone walks over his head."

"Do you happen to know what kind of irons they carry?" I asked.

"Yes," he told me. "They ironed Billy Duckworth. He went for the two of them, with an iron belaying-pin, after they had both been kicking him. They laid him out stiff; and ironed him down in the lazarette. Kept him there three days on water. He told me they've got big iron rings, let into the deck of the lazarette, and a chain and padlock. The way they fixed him up, was by handcuffing his two hands together, and then passing the chain over the hand-

Digitized by Google

cuffs and through one of the rings in the deck, and padlocking him there, like a wild beast."

"Um!" I said; "and of course the lazarette's kept locked?"

"I don't know," he answered. "I don't see it matters anyway. It's not the lazarette that's going to be any use to us."

"Perhaps not," I said. "It certainly sounds a tough proposition. Let's go and have a drink."

CHAPTER II

BULLY DUNKAN signed me on, in a joyous mood, for him! But I had to ape to be half drunk, or he'd have smelled several kinds of a rat; for free, American white-men don't offer to go promiscuously to sea with him; unless they're either not sober, or they're on the rocks; and I wasn't ragged enough for that yarn to tally-up with appearances.

The ship was a wooden barque of about 500 tons, and Bully Dunkan carried no Second Mate; for the bosun used to stand his watch for him, Marine Law Regulations or not!

The only two of the old crew who had not been run out of the ship, were Miles, and Sandy Meg, the rather soft-witted man who had been in the boat that night with Miles. I found that he had been made acting steward, as the last man had been run out with the others. I daresay the arrangement suited Bully Dunkan very well; for he never raised Meg's wages, and as acting steward he remained.

By good fortune, Miles and I were both picked in the same watch—the Mate's. Two days out at sea,

Digitized by Google

there started the usual kind of Bully Dunkanism. One of the men, a big "Dutchman," in a foolish moment, imagined that his two hundred and fifty pounds of brawn and simplicity were the equivalent of Bully Dunkan's two hundred pounds of brawn and hell-fire. As a result, when Dunkan kicked the big Dutchman, the man turned on the Skipper, and held an enormous bony fist under his nose, just through that brief length of time that it took Bully Dunkan to realise the amazing fact.

"Shmell that!" said the huge Dutchman, in his sublime innocence.

Apparently there was something displeasing to the Skipper in the odour of the big Dutchman's homely fist; for he never said a word; but the crack he hit the Dutchman was heard by the watch below in the fo'cas'le.

There was no need for the Bully to accentuate his protest further; but being Bully Dunkan, he—well, he just Dunkanised, and jumped on the big man with his sea-boots, until I was almost angry enough to have interfered.

After all was over, however, the Dutchman was not really badly hurt. His ribs were like the ribs of a horse, and his spirit was like the spirit of a milch cow; and he was a first class sailorman. I have frequently seen them built on these lines, which are much approved by Skippers of the "Yankee Skipper" type.

I had a word with Miles, after this bit of bother.

"See here, Miles," I said, "if that unpleasant person aft, or his pet Hogge try that sort of game again on you, or attempt liberties with this particular American citizen who's talking to you, why then, my friend,

Digitized by Google

we've both got to stick to each other, several degrees closer than the proverbial brother. And if one of us gets a taste of the irons, the other has got to go through it with him. Sumga? So keep those tools and oddments we got in 'Frisco, handy in your pockets, savvy?"

"Yes, John," said Miles, in his sober way. "I think I follow what's in your mind."

And at that I left it.

The next day, in the morning watch, I had an adventure with the Mate. Perhaps I ought to admit that the adventure was less of his seeking than mine; but, I thought perhaps certain plans I had in my head, might as well pass into action, early as late. And, in short, I sought trouble with both hands; so waste no pity on me; but give me what a Frenchman I once knew, called the liniment of your understanding.

I had been set to work on a paunch-mat, for chafing gear; and I decided that a smoke might be a soothing adjunct, to me; though I could hardly say truthfully that I expected the Mate would view it personally as a sedative. That I was right in this conclusion, I soon proved; for the Hogge, happening soon to come along the main-deck, let out a gasp as he came opposite to where I was working, foreside of the mainmast.

I pretended an entire innocence of anything unorthodox; but all the same, I slackened the bite I had on my pipe; for I was too far from a dentist, just at the moment.

The next thing I knew, the Mate (a hefty brute he was too), had made one jump for me. He gripped the pipe and tore it out of my mouth, with a violence

Digitized by Google

that might have left a serious gap, had I not been prepared.

I turned slowly, and looked at him, as mildly as I could. He held the pipe in his fist, by the bowl; and seemed to be a little too full for words.

"Ah!" I said, "was it you who just removed my pipe?"

"Of all——" he began; and became incoherent. . . . "You shore got some nerve, you have!" was what he finally managed to reduce it to. This is, of course, a strictly expurgated quote.

"You ought *really* to be a little more careful," I explained. "I don't mind you borrowing my pipe; indeed I'll make you a gift of it; for I never care to smoke after other people; but you should really be a little more careful. You might have loosened one or more of my incisors, and dentists do make such awful charges."

"Say!" he shouted, and caught hold of his own throat, in a very ecstasy of deep feeling. "Say!" he shouted again. "Say! . . ."

He yelled it this time; and if I had never heard despair before, I should recognise it in future.

"I'm listening," I assured him, anxious to help him in every way. "Is it matches you want, or . . ."

But he relieved himself abruptly, with a remarkable exhibition of energy. In brief, he came for me, nearer mad than sane. I doubt whether anyone had ever spoken him fair and gentle before in all his rough, sinful life; and he was anxious to record his impressions—on me!

Now, I am not a big man; not when compared with the two-hundred-and-fifty pound Dutchman, or even

Digitized by Google

the two-hundred pound Skipper, or the Hogge, who must weigh almost as much. I weigh a hundred and seventy-five pounds, stripped; but then I have fought in the ropes many a score of times, and I am rather unusually strong for a man of my weight; therefore, perhaps, you will understand why I was pleased to accept the Hogge's attentions in as warm a fashion as he could have wished.

He swung two mighty right and left hand punches at my head, which was certainly "not there" when the punches arrived; and he followed this by a second and a third right-and-left, right-and-left, grunting like a hogge, as he hit.

There was a clatter of feet, and good old Miles came racing up, to bear a hand; but I checked him.

"All right," I called out. "The Hogge and I are having a little argument." I slipped under the Mate's right, as I spoke. "Hark to him grunt!" I added, and shot my own right up under the man's unpleasant chin, with the lift of my shoulder under it. He went away from me, all loose, just as a man does who gets a punch of that kind. I went after him, with two steps, and hit him again, this time with a straight left-hand punch right below the point of the sternum.

As I hit, I was vaguely aware that someone had come at me, with a run, and Miles had jumped in between. The Mate concluded his falling movement and hit the deck. He lay as quiet as a tired babe, and I was able to glance round.

I saw that Miles and Bully Dunkan were mixing it, in the prettiest kind of a fight; only that Miles was no match for the Skipper, especially with his face and jaw still so tender, that a touch hurt like a blow.

Digitized by Google

The next thing, I knew, poor old Miles was down and out, on the deck; and that two hundred pounds of Evil and Fight was charging me, in a silent ugly way that meant business.

Now, Captain Bully Dunkan could fight, and he knew how to use his hands; also he weighed almost two stones more than I do. But my years of ring-work stood for all that, and more. I slipped my head under his left drive, countering hard with my left on his nose; for I wished to daze and weaken him a bit, without knocking him out.

He had no *real* foot-work, and he was a little slow; but there was quite enough of the human hurricane to him, as he bored in at me, punching with right and left, to make me careful. I can quite believe that he must have proved a tough proposition for the average rough-and-ready fighter.

Bully Dunkan was no pretty sight, as any boxing man will understand, when you remember that I had landed a hard, straight, left punch on his nose, as he rushed me; but he was not really damaged; and I set out now to knock some of the steam out of him. I had already side stepped and slipped him all around a twelve foot circle; and it tickled me a little to see the way the men stood about the decks, almost stiffened with amazement, as they realised that I was not "eaten clean up."

I came in suddenly at the Bully; pushed his right up smartly with my left hand, and landed him a hard, solid punch on the side of the jaw; but not heavy enough to knock him out. He rocked back an instant, with his chin snicked up in the air; and I could see that he was all adrift for the moment. Then

Digitized by Google

he steadied, and rushed me, hitting with right and left.

He was panting badly now, and I slid under his left arm, and hit him a good body thump as I passed him. Then I sprang at him from behind, caught him by his two shoulders, put my knee hard into his back, and brought him down with a deuce of a thud on to his broad back. This shook him badly, and took the evil out of him a lot. When he got up, I hit him a right and left punch over the heart, and as he tried to grab me, I uppercut him under the chin, with a straight-armed, right upward swing.

I guessed now that he'd had a lot of the ugliness dazed out of him, and he would not be able to hurt too much, if I let him hit me. However, I had to take some chances; for it's my experience of life, that gold has to be worked and suffered for! Yet, to make sure he was as weak as possible, I stalled off his next rush, with a heavyish left-hand thump in his great bull neck, and a right-hand punch, pretty hard, in the short ribs. Then I let him hit me; but he was gasping heavily, and rocking a little on his feet as he struck, and the blow I took from him, hardly made my eyes water; yet, I threw out my hands, and sagged, and collapsed backwards on to the hatch, with a thud that shook me up a lot more than his punch. And there I lay, never moving.

"Got yer!" roared Bully Dunkan, with a gasp, and aimed a clumsy kick at me, where I lay; but I had so weakened him, that he staggered over sideways, and sat down heavily beside me on the hatch, and was immediately very sick indeed.

I never moved or opened my eyes, and presently, I

Digitized by Google

heard him bellowing weakly for one of the men to go aft and tell the steward, who, as you know, was Sandy Meg, to bring the irons.

They hand-cuffed me first, where I lay, apparently unconscious. I could hear Bully Dunkan, sitting near me on the hatch, groaning a little. After they had hand-cuffed me, I heard them gather round poor Miles, and then came the chink of the cuffs, and I knew that he too was ironed.

"Take 'em aft, Stooard, an' dump 'em down the lazarette," shouted Dunkan. "You, Lang an' Tarbrey an' Mike, give a hand with the hogs, an' one of you others shove a bucket o' water over that fool Mate o' mine, an' fetch him round. . . ."

He broke off, and groaned a bit; then turned suddenly on my "unconscious" body.

"You——!" he said, vilely, and bashed his sea-booted heel a couple of times into my ribs, where I lay; but he broke nothing; for he was still too shaken to be his true self. Then I was picked up, shoulders and feet, and carried aft. I could hear men's feet stumbling ahead of me, and knew they were carrying Miles first; and behind me, there was the voice of Bully Dunkan, cursing; and then a sound of thrown water, by which I knew they were heaving cold water over the Mate.

"They's washing down th' Hogge!" I heard the man mutter who was carrying my feet. . . . "Carry 'im easy, mate; I'm 'is friend for life an' hevermore, the way he's outed the First Mate an' pasted the Skipper. Ee's a holy terror!"

I gathered that the latter part of the man's remark applied to me; but I kept my eyes shut.

Digitized by Google

"Wasn't it just swate the way he played round the Olé Man," said the man at my head. (I could tell it was Mike.) "I'm lackin' to know, bejabers, how he come to get knocked out at all, at all!"

It is unnecessary to say that I did not explain that I was entirely un-knocked-out, if I may so put it. I had a secret plan to carry out, and a ship's fo'cas'le is no place to hold secrets long; so I remained knocked-out and limp, to them and all the world of that moment.

Five minutes later, Miles and I were chained down to the floor of the lazarette; and to make sure that it was done right, Bully Dunkan came groaning and cursing down the steep ladder, and locked and tested the padlocks himself. Then he took the keys of the irons from Sandy Meg, and pocketed them; after which he kicked Miles once, and me twice; and I certainly wished I had hit him about, a little more than I had. However, I managed to keep silent, and in a minute he had gone, with the steward and the men. I heard the heavy trap dropped, and afterwards the sound of a key, locking it.

The first part of my plot was achieved. Miles and I were in the lazarette.

CHAPTER III

Poor Miles lay very quiet, where the men had put him. For my part, I ached considerably, and had something of a fight to check the anger that was boiling up in me for the way Bully Dunkan had kicked the two of us, after we were ironed.

But I reasoned myself out of it. I had arranged the

Digitized by Google

whole thing, with a perfect knowledge of the kind of man the Skipper was; and it was hardly logical, I told myself, to be all of a bubble inside me, because I had received the due portion of Dunkanism which I had earned. It was part of the price we had to pay for the saving of Bully Dunkan's soul; for only by affliction could such an one be saved from his thoroughly earned fate. Incidentally, as I have mentioned before, gold is a painful metal to achieve—either slow or painful; and frequently both.

Thus I shook myself, mentally, and became slowly able to delay the shedding of Bully Dunkan's blood.

I leaned towards poor Miles, in the absolute darkness; but I could not touch him; for the ring-bolts, to which we were chained, were evidently calculated to be just sufficiently far apart to prevent unevenly tempered seamen from mingling their tears.

I saw that it was time I brought into use some of the various little preparations which I had made for our adventure. I reached into my pockets and found, first of all, a box of matches and half a candle.

I lit the candle, and stood it on the deck of the lazarette. Then I took, from a small pocket I had stitched in the waistband of my trousers, a sawn hand-cuff key, such as is used by those apparently clever jugglers, who make their living by persuading unfortunate and credulous people to lock numberless pairs of hand-cuffs upon them, immediately afterwards retiring into hiding, while they quickly unlock them with a key like the one I held; after which they return to the audience and exhibit the irons (but not the key) and obtain thereby much applause.

The beauty of this key is at once evident. It is

Digitized by Google

like an ordinary hand-cuff key, only longer in the barrel and made of steel. It is then sawn lengthways down the barrel, so that it is possible to press it on to the screwed end of the bolt that holds a hand-cuff shut, and then a mere pull opens the cuff, and the prisoner is free. As a key of this kind will fit almost any standard make of cuff, it is an entirely useful pocket adjunct to adventurers, criminals, conjurers and the like!

With this key, I unlocked the cuff on my right wrist, and let the chain that passed over it, from the ring-bolt in the floor, fall on to my knees. I was free.

I took the candle; put the matches in my pocket, and crept over to Miles. He was lying huddled, where they had dropped him, and I set-to and straightened him out. Then I unlocked his cuffs, and began to rub his hands. After a bit, I opened his shirt and rubbed his chest, hard; and presently he moved a little.

"Ssh!" I said; for he had suddenly kicked out. "Keep quiet. You're all right. We're down in the lazarette." But he was not conscious enough yet to comprehend me.

Ten minutes later, he was talking to me, a little stupidly at first; but he improved every half minute.

"Have you got your gun on you?" I asked him, as soon as he was all right.

"Yes," he told me. "In my right sea-boot. And I've those candles in my pockets, you told me to carry around, and two boxes of matches. The auger fixing and the screwdriver are in my left boot; and the long narrow canvas sack you made, is wrapped round my waist, under my shirt."

Digitized by Google

"That's all right," I said. "I've got my automatic in one sea-boot and the narrow saw and the files in the other; and I've got the keys and a dozen half candles and three boxes of matches and the bottle of dope in my pockets; and a belt-full of cartridges under my shirt. We'll do fine. I've even got a little black beeswax, to hide any bright gaps we may have to make with the files."

"John!" he said, suddenly, heaving himself up into a sitting position. "It's just struck me, they've not taken our sheath-knives or our matches or pipes or tobacco or anything. I've got all mine on me. If they had, they'd have discovered the matches and candles and your bunches of keys. They've forgotten! And that means they'll be coming down, as soon as ever they remember, to search us and take them away. They'll never leave us with our matches and sheath-knives, and I'll bet they'll take our tobacco, so as to stop us having even the comfort of a chew."

"By Jove! I'll bet you're right," I said. "It's a mercy you thought of it. Here, out with everything, automatic, auger, screwdriver, candles, matches, the bag—everything! No, leave one box of matches and your pipe and leave a bit of your plug. That'll make them sure you've not hidden anything; and they'll not maul you as much, searching you—see? I'll do the same. Hurry up, man! They may be down any minute."

I had been emptying my pockets and my boots, while I was speaking, and I even slipped off my hidden belt of cartridge-clips. I took the whole lot of things, and wrapped them in my red cotton handkerchief. Then, taking the lighted candle, I went

Digitized by Google

quietly across the lazarette, and hid the stuff behind the bread barrels.

I came back, and locked Miles up again, and afterwards myself, and blew out and hid the candle.

"When they come, you'd better be sitting up," I told him; "so as to be able to guard your face, if he kicks you."

"Right!" he answered. "Where have you put the key for the cuffs? They mustn't find that on you."

"I've put it behind one of these chocks that keep these sugar-casks from rolling," I told him. "I can just reach it, lying down and stretching."

"Good!" he said; and as he spoke, we heard the key put into the lock of the trap door, somewhere above us in the darkness, over to starboard.

The trap was lifted, and an oblong of shadowy daylight showed in the deck above us.

Then I heard the Skipper's voice; he was cursing Sandy Meg, the steward. Directly afterwards, his feet came into sight, and his bulk blotted out most of the daylight. He reached the bottom of the ladder, and Sandy Meg came down also, carrying a lantern.

Bully Dunkan walked across to us, with the steward following and holding the lantern up.

"Well now, I do admire that!" he said, stopping in front of Miles. "So you're sitting up on your little hind legs, Sonny, a-ready. That was a tidy clip I landed you, now; don't ye think so!"

He spoke a bit snuffily, because of the punch I had hit him on the nose, which looked emphatically enlarged, in the lantern-light.

"Now, Steward," he went on, "I'm a-going to take

Digitized by Google

away his little pipe an' matches, *and* his knife. . . . Lie down, you goat, while I go through you!"

This last was to Miles, and Bully Dunkan gave my friend a push with his foot, that rolled him over on to his side. Then the Skipper went through his pockets, and took away everything he had, including his knife.

When he had done with Miles, he came over to me.

"So *you're* come round too, are you!" he said. "Maybe you thought you could hand it out to me; but you was mistook, dear friend. . . . You was mistook, I tells you!"

He repeated this in a shout, and then, without another word, as if the memory of the way I'd hammered him, drove him mad, he took a swinging kick at me, and got me in the ribs, with a thud that made me feel sick.

Twice more, he kicked me; then bashed me over on to the deck, with his foot, and went through my pockets. He took all he found, also my sheath-knife.

"Mister Hogge will be coming down in a bit, maybe, to have a little word with you," he said, catching hold of my ears, and twisting them brutally until they bled.

I began to regret that I had locked myself up again. Perhaps it was as well; for if I could have got free that moment, I should certainly have tried to kill him.

However, I managed to keep from making a sound; and then he let go, and stood back a step, staring down at me. I bit my teeth hard together for a moment, so as to steady myself. Then I spoke:—

"How is the Hogge, Cap'n?" I said, and stared up at him, smiling as well as I could. "Tell him, with

Digitized by Google

my compliments, I'll be pleased to hear him grunt a bit, any time he likes."

He never answered a word, for a moment; then burst out into a great laugh.

"I'll hand the Mate that," he said. He roared out again into his brute of a laugh. "Oh, my bonny boy, but ye'll hear him grunt, I'm thinkin'. I'll hand him that, sure I will. It'll rat him rank mad."

He turned away, hove the things he had taken from us, down into an empty box on the floor of the lazarette, out of our reach, and went straight away up the ladder, with the steward following with the lamp. The trap was slammed, and I heard it locked. Then Miles spoke to me:—

"Did he hurt you much, old man?"

"Not to mention it," I said. "It seemed to tickle him about the Mate. If I understand his kind, right, though; he'll never let the Hogge down here. He'd sooner use us to rag the Hogge with. That's just his way. He's got to be unpleasant to someone, or he couldn't keep well. Did he damage you at all?"

"No," said Miles; "but I wanted badly to plug him."

"Never mind!" I answered. "When this business is through, safely, I'm promising myself the pleasure of cutting loose, properly, just for five heavenly minutes on the Dunk."

CHAPTER IV

MILES and I had talked everything over, a score of times before ever I started the row with the Hogge, which had landed us in our much desired lazarette.

Digitized by Google

We knew that the money must be in Bully Dunkan's own cabin; for where else in a windjammer would he be likely to keep it! Also we knew that the trap of the lazarette opened directly under his cabin table; and, finally, I had a bunch of "master" keys, and if these wouldn't do, I could possibly unscrew the lock with the screwdriver.

"We'll tackle the job to-night, Miles," I said, after we had sat in the dark for a couple of minutes, listening. "He'll not keep us down here more than a day or two. It would break his heart to have two or three hundred pounds of sailor-flesh sitting idle. He'll probably give us nothing but water, like Billy Duckworth; more power to Billy for going for him! Then he'll boot us out, as soon as he thinks he's put the fear of God into us sufficiently."

"You mean, if we don't do the job at once, we may be out of here again, before we get the chance," he said.

"Just that," I answered. "Things are ideal for us now in every way. One of the minor reasons why I wanted to be ironed safely down here, was so that he could have no suspicion of either of us; for, I tell you, he'll have the whole ship pretty well capsized, and every man and sea-chest aboard, searched, when he finds the loot is gone, like the little song says, away and away-oh!"

"Um!" said Miles. "I never thought of that. I don't see how you're going to hide the stuff, in that case."

"Think again," I answered. "It all works out perfectly. He has the key of this place in his pocket,

Digitized by Google

and therefore he'll never suppose that the money may be down here."

"Um!" said Miles, again. "And how are we going to get it out of here, without his seeing we're loaded up? Why man! The package they hove into the boat that night, must have weighed getting on for a hundredweight, by the sound it made, and the way they carried it."

"The ventilator," I explained. "It comes down through the poop-deck and the cabin-deck, and opens over that top shelf, just behind you. What do you suppose I made the canvas bag that shape for! We'll put the coin into it, and stand it behind the boxes, right under the ventilator. The ventilator is not in use just now, and the cowl is unshipped, and the sleeve it fits on is covered with a brass cap.

"Well, last night, in the middle watch, it was pretty black as you know; so I took a chance, and crept along to the ventilator, and lifted the cap. It's got a ring inside, for lashing it down by. All I did, was to bend on a chest-lashing to this ring, and let the end come down here. Then I put the lid back in place. It's hanging there now, you'll find; and we've only to make it fast to the neck of the canvas bag, and the job will be done, so far as down here is concerned. The rest we can manage when we get shoved on deck again. It'll be just as simple as the job I had, to fix on the chest-lashing. That all clear, man?"

"Yes," he said. "Very neat plan. . . . Can't we have a light now, and get out of these irons?"

"Wait a bit," I said. "There's someone at the trap, now."

The trap was opened, and Bully Dunkan and the

Digitized by Google

steward came down again. The Captain had the lantern, and the steward carried a bucket of water and a cup. This, he set on the deck of the lazarette, midway between Miles and me, where we could both reach it.

Dunkan kicked us each, and examined our irons; after which he grunted in a satisfied way.

"There's something to get your backs up on, my bonny boys," he said, giving the bucket a push with his foot. "It's all you'll get for forty-eight hours. Don't make hogs of yourselves!"

Then he went, laughing viciously, and ushering Sandy Meg before him up the ladder. The trap shut, and we heard the key turn.

"The ——!" said Miles, out of the darkness.

"Couldn't have been better!" I whispered back. There's grub all round us, there's water in the bucket; what more could a man want! Wait while I find the key."

CHAPTER V

It was some hours later, and we were both out of the irons again, and standing, listening on the ladder that led up to the trap.

Bully Dunkan was in his cabin, and the Hogge was with him, and there was a constant chink of coin, and a low mutter of talk.

"What's that?" I heard the Hogge say; and I sweated a little; for I was trying my bunch of "master" keys on the lock of the trap, and I had made a bit of a rattle, fumbling there in the shadows and swaying candle-light; and the ship rolling more than a trifle.

Digitized by Google

"It's yon damn steward," said Bully Dunkan. . . . "What is it?" he roared out. "What the devil d'yer want?"

"I got the hot water, Sir, for the grog," I heard Sandy Meg's voice say, faintly, because he was evidently the other side of the cabin door.

"Bless his dear heart an' liver!" said Bully Dunkan. Then, in a lower voice:—"Here, shove this chart over the stuff, while I opens the door."

It was plain to both of us, now, beyond all doubt, that the Hogge and the Captain had the dollars nakedly on the table before them, as one might say; and were counting them, with the door locked. I tell you, it made me feel so close to the stuff, that I could have found it in my heart to open the trap there and then, and wade into the two of them, with the aid of our automatics. Only, of course, this would have been clumsy, and might have ended in my having to send the Dunikan (as Miles would insist on calling him) and the Hogge prematurely to an investigation of those high temperatures which they were daily fitting themselves to appreciate.

I heard the cabin door unlocked and opened; and slammed and locked again. Then Bully Dunkan's voice, in a roar:—

"Drop that, you scow-bottomed down-Easter! Haul them dollar gold-pieces out of yer pocket, right this moment!"

"Say!" said the Hogge, "you quit that talk to me, Cap'n, or there'll be trouble. Say! . . ."

"You make me tired," said Bully Dunkan. "D'yer suppose I didn't see you! Do you suppose, you damn fool, I'm going blind. Ante up them dollars, Sonny dear, or——!"

Digitized by Google

"There was a sudden rustle, as if someone had moved quickly; then the Hogge's voice:—

"All right! *All* right! I was only jokin'. I'll tip the stuff up."

"No, Sonny! Sonny!" came Dunkan's voice. "Quit putting your lily-white hands into yer jacket pockets. Just keep 'em right on the table, plain in sight. They're bonny hands. Deary me, Mr. Mate, I'd no idee you took such keer of yer nails!"

I smiled, where I stood on the ladder; for I could picture the great horny black-rimmed nails of the Hogge. Miles, who was holding the candle, below me, laughed out loud; but checked himself in a moment.

It was plain to us, that the Captain had turned from the door, just in time to catch the Hogge weighting himself down with a spare preliminary handful, or two, of gold, before the division of the dollars had been carried out; and it was plain also, that the Captain had drawn his gun on the Hogge. Altogether, an interesting little situation.

I had just discovered a key on my bunch which turned the lock of the trap; and I thought this might be a suitable moment to make a brief investigation of facts.

"Blow out the light, Miles," I said. Then, very gently, I shot back the lock, and pressed the trap up, half an inch at a time, until I could see along the deck of the cabin.

Close to the edge of the trap, was a liberal pair of feet, in unstinted bluchers. I recognised them as the Hogge's, and wondered what he would think, if he suddenly stuck them out further, and encountered the

Digitized by Google

gaping hole of the little hatchway in which I stood! I hoped sincerely that he would keep still.

A little to my right, and standing about a yard away from the table, were the Bully's boots. My ribs recognised them almost before I did. They were painfully familiar acquaintances. I regarded them a moment, with a sudden pleasurable anticipation of what I should eventually DO to their owner.

"People who wear leather sea-boots, ought——"

I had got this far in my voiceless soliloquy, when I saw something else, on the deck, to the left of the Hogge's bluchers, and not a foot away from the edge of the hatch. It was the kettle of hot water for their grog, which the steward, Sandy Meg, had just handed in.

I had a sudden, and, some might say, an apparently insane longing to possess that kettle. I raised the trap a little higher, and reached out my left hand, slowly, until I could grab the kettle handle; and as I did so, the Bully's voice came, suddenly, and seeming abnormally loud and distinct, owing to the previous moments of silence, and to the fact that now there was no longer the thickness of the trap to deaden the sounds in the cabin.

"Don't move, Sonny!" he said; "not one single little blessed inch, or I'll plug you clean as any whistle you ever blowed."

I stiffened, where I was, and I took very good care not to move, as may be imagined. But I was not idle. I'm not that kind! The hatch cover (or trap) was propped open, resting on my head; my left hand was holding the handle of the kettle, and my right hand was free, and with my right hand, I was deaf-and-dumbing (single-hand-code) to Miles, to

Digitized by Google

pass me up my automatic. Then, I realised that he would not be able to read what I was saying, with the candle out; and I was going to risk what I might call a flying retreat, and chance Dunkan's gun.

But, in the very moment, when I was going to jump and let the hatch fall with a crash, Bully Dunkan spoke again:—

"I'm going to go through your pockets, Sonny son," he said, in his quiet, ugly way. And his feet moved, and went towards the Hogge.

Goodness! But I felt the relief. He had not seen me at all! He was still speaking to the Hogge. With the revulsion of feeling, I described myself briefly and exactly in unspoken phrases as a fool of the completest kind. Then, I lifted the kettle down into the hatchway, and lowered the trap (or hatch-cover) noiselessly shut again.

"Matches, quick, Miles!" I whispered.

"What's the kettle for, John?" he asked me, as the candle-flame rose and brightened. "What were you deaf-and-dumbing?"

"I thought the Dunkan had got me," I whispered. "Quick, the dope! This is the hot water for their grog. I'll make them sleep longer than the seven sleepers. I never knew such luck."

He raced for the bottle of "dope" (sleeping-draught, 'Frisco quality!) and handed it up to me. I poured about half of it into the kettle. I dared not risk more; for I felt that neither of them was ready; that is, not from a Christianlike way of looking at the matter. I told Miles to blow out the candle. Then, very carefully, I lifted the hatch-cover again, and put the kettle back, where I had found it under the table.

Digitized by Google

Bully Dunkan was standing at the back of the Hogge's chair, evidently going through his pockets, in an unemotional but thorough fashion.

"That's all, dear friend," I heard him say. "I guess I got yer gun; so you'll maybe check yer eevil propensities. What say now, to the grog?"

"Don't mind if I do," growled the Hogge.

I shut the hatch just in time, as Bully Dunkan reached under the table for the kettle.

Five minutes later, the Hogge grunted, with more than porcine satisfaction.

"That's good stuff, Cap'n," he said. "You're hell-fire an' you got ugly ways I ain't no use for; but I'll allow as you shore can make a grog-stew."

"I believe you, Sonny," said Bully Dunkan; and he also smacked his lips, in a way that was a good second to the Hogge's.

Down in the lazarette, Miles and I held on to each other, and tried to keep it as silent as we could; but that kind of laugh takes a deal of managing!

CHAPTER VI

DURING the next half-hour, I stood most of the time on the ladder, close up to the trap, listening.

At first, I could hear the Hogge and Bully Dunkan talking, with the constant accompanying chink, chink of money. Once, the Hogge began to grumble, but in a drowsy undertone, that was pleasantly suggestive to me of good, plain, efficient "dope," or knock-out-mixture—to give it only one or two of its varied names.

Abruptly, there came a dull thud on the deck, close to my head, and the sound of a shower of coins.

Digitized by Google

"Beas'ly . . . drunk . . . 'Ogg!" said Bully Dunkan, in a tone of indescribable senility; and with a long pause between each word.

"The Hogge's gone to sleep on the floor, and taken half the gold with him, I should judge by the sounds," I whispered down to Miles.

"How's the Dunikan?" he whispered back.

"Seems to be on his last legs," I said; "that is, by the way he's been trying to reprove the Hogge. He's just told him he's a beas'ly drunk 'Ogg; and it took him nearly half a minute to say it. . . . Ah! there he goes, too!"

For there had come a second thud on the deck, accompanied by a further cascading of coins.

I waited through a long couple of minutes, during which an absolute silence filled the cabin over my head. Then I lifted the trap slowly, and peeped through. The Hogge lay on his side, within a yard and a half of me. He looked crumpled and inert; but peacefully disposed. Bully Dunkan lay sprawled, at the end of the table, his legs under it, and his head lying on one of the Hogge's sea-boots. He had the same expression of peace.

All around the two of them, lay five, ten, and twenty dollar gold pieces. The two men were literally lying in wealth, if not in the lap of luxury. I never saw quite so much gold on the floor at one time, before or since.

"Come along, Miles," I said. "Bring the bag. They sleep as sleep the Innocent that knows no wrong; nor e'er hath taken aught that did belong, to any. . . ."

I ceased declaiming, and went up through the little

Digitized by Google

hatchway; and in a moment, Miles followed, with the long, strong, bolster-like, canvas bag, which I had made for this moment.

"Behold them, dear man," I said. "It's picturesque to see them lie among the gold."

"Good Lord!" answered Miles; "look at the pile on the table."

"I have," I told him. "And I'm not tired yet. Here you are, hold the bag, while I slide it off into it."

This was a short but pleasant piece of work. Then we set-to and picked up all the gold coins that lay about the deck of the cabin. When we had finished, the bag was simply awesomely full.

"Now, Miles," I said, "there are just one or two things to do, before we go below to our humble abode of darkness. We shall have to sacrifice a handful of gold; but we can spare it."

I took a handful out of the mouth of the long, narrow sack, and stepped across to Bully Dunkan's bunk. I unscrewed and opened the port-light that was in the ship's side, just over his bunk. I took several of the coins and laid them on the rebate of the port-hole, just *outside*. Then I placed a coin or two on the brass rim of the port-hole itself, trusting to luck that they would not slip off, with the rolling of the ship.

After that, I spread three or four coins about, in the sunk recess in the ship's side, which contained the port-light. The rest of the handful of gold, I scattered in a trail across the blankets of Bully Dunkan's bunk, in such a way as to lead the glance at once to the port-hole.

"What's it for, John?" asked Miles.

Digitized by Google

"Just a little way of easing some of the steam out of the search these two will make, when they wake up and find they're deficient in bullion," I told him. "You see, they'll be stumped. Each will suspect the other, and they'll search the ship, pretty well from truck to keelson. For they'll each argue that the gold *must* be in the ship, as no one would steal it, merely to dump it.

"But, if my little plan works, when they come to look round, and see the gold trail to the port, they'll get a horrid idea that one of them may have put the stuff through into the sea, in the mad, silly sort of way a man will do things when he's drunk.

"Of course, this won't stop them from suspecting each other, and it may not stop them from searching the ship; but, whatever happens, the possibility that one of them may have done this, will be always in the backs of their minds, and it will grow, as they fail to find the gold, until they come to the conclusion that they *must* have dumped the stuff overboard themselves.

"You know what a chap can do, in throwing his cash about, and being generally a fool, when he's boozed. . . . In rum out rhino! I guess it'll seem the only possible explanation, especially as they know they were safely locked in, when they started drinking.

"There's just one other little thing I've got to do."

I hunted round, until I found the drawer where Bully Dunkan stored his rum. Then I took out a couple of bottles, and knocked off the necks. I reached down a couple of clean glasses from the rack by the door, and poured us each a good tot.

"Here's health, Miles," I said. "We've earned it,

Digitized by Google

working like this for the soul-welfare of the Hogge and his master."

"To you, John," said Miles; and we drank.

"Then I dumped the two glasses out of the port, and took the two bottles of rum, and poured it liberally over the Bully and the Hogge, until they were soaked through, and they smelt to Heaven of the stuff. I took a third bottle, and slopped rum all over the table, and into their empty glasses. Finally, I emptied out what was left of the water and dope, in the kettle, and poured rum into it.

I threw the three empty bottles on to the floor, where I let them roll. I went back to the drawer, and picked up a full bottle. I held this above the others, and let it fall back with a crash. "Drunk men drop bottles, Miles," I observed.

He nodded.

"I guess you don't want them to suspect they were doped," he said. "You're out to make them think they must have gone in for an almightly drunk. That was a cute dodge, putting the rum into the kettle. They'll guess they must have done it, after they got muzzy, and got drinking the stuff neat."

"You've savvied, old friend," I said. "Let's get away below. Phoo! the place smells!"

Miles went down the ladder, half a dozen steps, and I lashed up the neck of the bag of gold with a leather lace out of one of the Captain's drawers. Then I lowered the bag on to Miles' shoulders, and he went slowly down to the bottom of the ladder. There must have been well over a hundred-weight of gold.

I followed Miles, and shut and locked the trap. Miles had already lighted a candle, and we set-to at

Digitized by Google

once, and put the gold behind the row of boxes on the shelf near the deck, right under the place where the cap of the closed ventilator-shaft opened. I had previously fixed two rope grommets in the shoulders of the bag, and to these I attached the hanging end of the chest-lashing, that I had made fast to the ring in the cap of the ventilator-shaft.

"Now, let's store all our tackle away, over behind the bread-casks," I said; "but we'll keep our automatics in our boots, in case the Bully comes down here and cuts loose on us, to ease his feelings. There's no saying what the sweet Dunkan may not be capable of, given a bad head and a sour mouth, an empty gold chest and a full revolver! So we'll keep the little guns handy. Now let us acquire a meal."

Half an hour later, we entered the irons again, and prepared to get some sleep.

"I guess the bo'sun'll have to keep double watch to-night, John," said Miles, just as I was dozing off.

"Poor beggar!" I answered, and was asleep before he could think of anything else.

CHAPTER VII

I was waked some hours later by a tremendous noise overhead. There were heavy blows on the deck, and Bully Dunkan was shouting, thickly.

"What is it, Miles?" I asked, and sat up in the darkness.

"They're waking up, John," he said.

"They appear to be doing it very thoroughly," I

Digitized by Google

replied. "It sounds as if Dunkan were massaging the Hogge."

"He's bumping his head on the deck," said Miles. "He'll kill him, instead of bringing him round."

"Probably, dear man," I answered; "but I don't think we're out to save the Hogge's bacon! If they finished each other, the world, and the sea especially, would be well shut of them. . . . Hark to him!"

There was a steady, monotonous bumping now on the deck of the cabin, above. I had no doubt that it was the Mate's head; also, I began to think Miles' prophecy would come right. The bumps were so vigorous, that they made the lazarette resound.

Abruptly, one of the bumps ended, in a curious, breaking sound.

"G' lor'!" said Miles. "Did you hear that? He's broke the Mate's head!"

The heavy blows had ceased, and there was a brief silence.

Suddenly, we both heard the Hogge's voice say, in a dazed tone:—

"Leggo my ears, dam yer! Leggo my ears!"

Miles sighed relief. I could hear him plainly, through the darkness.

"Thought that'd wake yer, my bonnie boy!" said Dunkan's voice. "Where's the gold?"

"Say! What's this blame thing I'm lyin' my 'ead on?" asked the Hogge, still a little dazed-seeming; but palpably returning again to this life.

"Where's the gold?" reiterated Bully Dunkan.

"What's this blame thing I got my 'ead on?" asked the Hogge, again. "It's blame sharp! . . . Leggo my ears, I tells yer. Leggo!"

Digitized by Google

There was a short scuffle; then the Hogge's voice again :—

"A broke ceegar-box, you old swine, you! I s'pose you thought it dam funny to bash me down on to that. I'm all cut with the broke wood. Dam your ugly ways!"

"Where's the gold?" asked Bully Dunkan. There was a sharp movement; and then the Hogge's voice, now less dazed than ever :—

"Say! Don't point that blame thing at me. You're too drunk to play with shootin' gear."

"Where's the gold?" asked Bully Dunkan. "I'm goin' to shoot in a minute."

There was a scurrying, lumpish sound, as if the Hogge had sat up suddenly.

"The gold!" he said, in a voice that denoted he was at last awake to the Complete Present. "The gold! Why we was countin' it . . . on the table. It's there, ain't it? Say! I feel dam bad. How ever much did we put down? I'm all . . ."

"Where's the gold?" said Bully Dunkan's voice, monotonously.

There were sounds, suggestive of the Hogge's essaying a standing position.

"Say!" he said, after a moment, in a stunned kind of voice, "the dollars is gone! Say . . . !" He broke off, and I heard his feet go at a clumsy run towards the cabin door. "Say!" he called out, "it's locked! Say, Cap'n! Say! I tell yer the blame door's locked!"

"Where's the gold?" came Bully Dunkan's everlasting reiteration. "You smart Hogge, you! Out with it, or I'll plug yer! Where's the gold?"

Digitized by Google

There followed a moment's silence.

"No, you blame well don't, Cap'n!" said the Hogge's voice, suddenly full of suspicion. "You don't put that over on *me*, dam yer! You don't foxy *me* that way! No, Siree!"

There was a sudden crash, and a chinkling down on the deck, of broken glass. One of them, probably the Hogge, had evidently thrown one of the empty bottles. There followed the rush of the Hogge's big bluchers, from the direction of the door; and simultaneously, there were two revolver shots, almost together.

Then came the thud of the two men meeting, and through the next five minutes, there was quite high-class trouble up above. Apparently, everything smashable in the cabin got smashed. The thuds, blows, stampings, breathless cussings, and the chorus-crashes of breakages, were impressive and stimulating to listen to.

Finally, it ended.

"That was some row, Miles," I said, through the darkness.

"It was, John," said Miles. "Listen to them now. They're feeling cooler."

The Hogge and Bully Dunkan were apparently collecting themselves. The still unco-ordinated fragments refused to attempt clear speech for a time. They wheezed, and achieved odd words and grunts, and displayed a very apparent breathlessness.

Finally, the Hogge amalgamated first.

"Say! You might ha' blame well plugged me, dam your ugly ways!"

"What d'yer want to go slingin' bottles around for,

Digitized by Google

then!" Bully Dunkan managed to articulate, with generous pauses.

They appeared, both of them, to be on the floor; for presently I heard them scrambling and slurring their heavy boots, as they got slowly to their feet.

One of them walked across the cabin, towards the bunk. It was Bully Dunkan; for his voice came the next moment:—

"Look a-here, quick!" he said. "Good Lord! Look a-here!"

The Hogge's bluchers stumbled hastily across the cabin. There was a full quarter minute silence, completely eloquent with horror.

"Say! . . ." began the Hogge; and was silent again. Then, with simple despair, he said all that he was capable of:—"Say! *All them dollars!*"

Neither man spoke, for maybe a minute after that. They were both acquainted with liquor and its vagaries when imbibed in largish quantity. They both knew that "in liquor," or "full" as they more briefly described it, in the troubled talk that followed, a man will do anything.

"It's worse," said the Hogge, sadly, "than when I got drunk in Val'parazo an' give the bar-man five hundred dollars, all I had. My pay-day for fifteen months. An' next day, he'd not even stand me a drink. Swore I'd not give him a cent. Said he made a point never to take presents."

We heard them moving about.

"I guess this is the kettle, right enough. It's flat; but there's a drop of stuff in it," said Dunkan's voice; and I could hear him tasting something, with a clumsy smacking of his lips.

Digitized by Google

"It's neat rum," he announced, mournfully. "No wonder we was screwed. I guess we filled the kettle, an' then forgot, an' thought it was water."

"Three empty bottles on the deck," said the Hogge, gloomily, "an' the dee-canter."

There followed a long period of flat silence.

"Guess I'd best go up an' relieve the bo'sun," said the Hogge, in a sombre voice.

There was no thought of searching the ship. My little plot had worked, just the way I like a plot to work. Bully Dunkan and the Hogge accepted what I might call the Suggestion of the Port Hole, as at once a practicable and a probable solution of the mystery. It tallied both with the teachings of their Experience and the suggestions of their Reason. I felt that I had done much to help the cause of temperance.

CHAPTER VIII

We were released some hours later, at midday.

That night, during the Hogge's watch, while he was sleeping soundly and illegally on the weather-seat of the cabin-skylight, I crept up on to the poop, lifted the cap of the ventilator, and hauled on the chest-lashing. Half a minute later, I had the long, narrow bag up through the ventilator shaft, and beside me on the deck. I cast off the chest-lashing from the cap of the ventilator, and pressed the cap down into place again.

All this, I had managed, without ever rising to my feet; and the bag had been hard to pull up, in that position. Now, I took a look aft over the skylight. It was a pretty quiet night; but very dark. I could

Digitized by Google

hear the Hogge snoring in a most satisfactory fashion; and the man at the wheel just showed vaguely in the light from the binnacle; so I guessed he could not see me. Then, I gripped the bag in my arms, stood up and walked, barefooted, to the lee stair-way, where Miles was waiting for me.

"The bo'sun's locker!" I said; and we carried the bag there. Inside the locker, we fastened the door, and I lighted a candle I had ready in my pocket. Then, among all the mucker of chain, chain-hooks, marlin-spikes, serving-mallets, sampson-line, spun-yarn, good Stockholm-tar, and the like, the two of us started to pack the gold into a lot of little canvas bags that Miles and I had made ready for the job. We hurried like mad; for we stood to lose everything, if anyone found us locked in there, at that time of night.

At last, we had all the cash divided up into little bags, about ten or twelve pounds weight each, I should think; and we hid all but four of them at the back of the tar-barrel.

We blew out the candle, unlocked the door, and got out on deck, each of us with a bag in each of the side-pockets of our jackets. We walked forrard into the fo'cas'le, where most of the watch on deck were playing poker, sitting on deck-buckets.

Miles and I opened our sea-chests, and pretended to rummage a bit; and while we were rummaging, we managed to stow away our little bags of gold, without one of the shell-backs seeing us.

We made three more journeys, during the next half hour; and this way, we managed to store the gold away in our sea-chests, without one of all those sinners in that crowded fo'cas'le ever guessing a thing we

Digitized by Google

didn't want guessed! And a good job done, too; when you remember that a fo'cas'le is never empty at sea.

CHAPTER IX

We made a pretty fair passage round; and Miles and I did our best to put up with the Hogge's little ways and Bully Dunkan's, without causing a riot. We each had to stand a kicking or two; and we were each knocked down several times; and we held ourselves back in a way that made me realise what a good Christian must have to go through in this life.

"There's a better time coming," I told Miles. "Keep the lid on until then, old man. We've too much at stake, to risk trouble, till the loot's safe ashore."

The day we reached Boston, Miles and I had a final knocking about from Bully Dunkan and the Hogge, and it took every ounce of our hundred weight, or so, of hard-earned gold, to enable us to put up with it quietly.

That night, however, we got the stuff safely ashore, and stored it at the house of one of Miles' friends. Then we felt free at last to interview Dunkan and the Hogge, without stint. And my friend Miles was quite as eager as I.

"The Hogge's your mutton," I told him. "The Bully for me! I can still feel where his sea-boot took me in the seat of my pants this morning."

Miles was very well content with the arrangement; and as we both felt we couldn't wait another hour, we decided to go right back to the ship there and then,

Digitized by Google

and see whether Bully Dunkan and the Hogge had got back aboard again.

We met Sandy Meg, returning from the galley to the cabin; and he told us that both of them were in the cabin, and he was just taking their supper aft.

"Sandy Meg," I said, "we're going in to see the Old Man and the Hogge. We're going to tell him we want to be paid off."

"They'll murder you," said Sandy Meg. "The Skipper's rotten to-night. He knocked me flat as soon as the two of 'em come back aboard, just 'cause I'd not got the supper ready. How was I to know they'd be comin' back aboard as soon as this; an' first night ashore, too!"

"Sandy Meg," I said, "you keep out of the cabin for ten minutes. Go up on the poop, and have a free seat in the gallery. You can see what happens, through the skylight. Miles and I are going to paste up those two brutes; and pay them back some of what's coming to them. Don't fret about us. We let them lick us out at sea, for reasons of our own. This is going to be different."

Sandy Meg said never a word; but put his tray down on the main-hatch, silent and grimly joyful, and went up to have his free "gallery seat" through the flap of the open skylight.

Miles and I went in through the door, under the break of the poop, and walked straight into the cabin, where the Dunkan and the Hogge sat, waiting at the table, and looking fretful enough, each of them, to make me think they must have had a poor evening ashore.

"We've come to ask you to pay us off, Cap'n," I said.

Digitized by Google

They jumped, and then sat silent; neither of them saying a word; being momentarily incapacitated from doing anything else.

"We've come to ask you to pay us off, or else discharge the Hogge, Cap'n," I said. "We don't like being kicked; but it's not dignified being kicked by a grunter. You'll remember, Cap'n, that I remarked once before that he grunted. I think you agreed with me. It isn't dignified——"

But that was all they allowed me to explain. The Hogge snatched up a plate, and it spoiled the maple-wood bulkshead behind me. Then both he and the Captain came for us, with their fists.

There wasn't much room; but quite sufficient; for I'd not come there to play light. As the Bully rushed me, I propped him off with one clean left hand hit in the neck; and the way his stern met the deck of the cabin, was a thing to remember; at least I can't see him forgetting it.

Miles and the Hogge were having a great time of it, over by the end of the table; and before the Bully had got up and rushed me again, Miles had got that brute of a Hogge up against one of the cabin bulksheads, and was hitting him, quick and monotonous, right and left, right and left, just wherever he pleased. And as he hit, he seemed to be intoning a number of things that the Hogge must have been the better and wiser for hearing.

The Bully was up again by now, and he rushed me, hitting with both hands, like a madman. I slipped clean under his right, and punched him up against the bulkshead, as he tumbled past me.

He came round, like a shot, and took a flying kick

Digitized by Google

at me; but I declined to be at home, and his foot took the edge of the cabin table, instead, and kicked a strip clean off it, fore and aft, about six inches wide.

"Captain, dear," I said, "you'll not have a bit of furniture left; the way you and the Hogge carry on."

He rushed me a third time, putting his head down to butt me in the stomach; but I brought up my knee quickly, and made him straighten wonderfully.

"Now, Bully Dunkan," I said, as he tried twice to hit me with his elbows, "here's what's coming to a brute and a bully and a murderer like you!" And with that, I slipped a left-handed swing of his, and punched him hard on the short ribs with my left hand; then, I crossed in over with my right hand, as his head came forward; and I hit him clean on the side of his chin, close up to the point. I hit with my body and leg to help the blow; and Bully Dunkan went down with a crash, as he had laid many a poor devil of a sailorman out.

Miles had finished now with the Hogge, who lay on the deck, showing no interest in anything; and I decided we had done enough, both for pleasure and for common justice.

"Come along, Miles," I said. "They'll keep in a restful state of mind for a bit, I reckon. Pity we can't lynch them."

Outside on the deck, Sandy Meg nearly hugged us.

"My oath!" he said. "My oath; but that did me good to see!"

Miles and I went forrard and rummaged our sea-chests; the chests themselves we decided not to bother with, and presented them to two of the men who were without. Then we said good-bye to the old ship; and

Digitized by Google

went ashore. We had enough to buy new sea-chests, we decided, if ever we were fools enough to need such things again.

* * * * *

The next day, I sent the following letter to Bully Dunkan and the Mate:—

"Dear Captain and Hogge,

"Let me commend to your earnest notice the following observations:—

1.—Handcuffs have keys.

2.—Lazarette-hatches have the same weakness.

3.—Dope (especially 'Frisco quality) is most effective, particularly when put into, say, a kettle of hot grog-water, left on the deck near a lazarette hatch.

4.—Gold, in almost any form; but especially in gold-dollar shape, is a peculiarly useful and likeable metal.

5.—A punch on the point of the jaw is an instant cure for most evils. N.B. How is your jaw? Hope I didn't hit too hard.

6.—Hogges grunt. Get rid of the habit or the Hogge.

7.—There is a little, unknown island, somewhere in the Pacific, known to you and the Hogge. If you will supply us with the latitude and the longitude of same, we shall be pleased to hand the information over to the police, with *all* particulars. Failing which, we must appropriate certain useful metal to our own use.

"From an old shipmate."

Digitized by Google

THE STONE SHIP

RUM things!—Of course there are rum things happen at sea— As rum as ever there were. I remember when I was in the *Alfred Jessop*, a small barque, whose owner was her skipper, we came across a most extraordinary thing.

We were twenty days out from London, and well down into the tropics. It was before I took my ticket, and I was in the fo'cas'le. The day had passed without a breath of wind, and the night found us with all the lower sails up in the buntlines.

Now, I want you to take good note of what I am going to say:—

When it was dark in the second dog watch, there was not a sail in sight; not even the far off smoke of a steamer, and no land nearer than Africa, about a thousand miles to the Eastward of us.

It was our watch on deck from eight to twelve, midnight, and my look-out from eight to ten. For the first hour, I walked to and fore across the break of the fo'cas'le head, smoking my pipe and just listening to the quiet. . . . Ever heard the kind of silence you can get away out at sea? You need to be in one of the old-time wind-jammers, with all the lights dowsed, and the sea as calm and quiet as some queer plain of death. And then you want a pipe and the

Digitized by Google

lonesomeness of the fo'cas'le head, with the caps'n to lean against while you listen and think. And all about you, stretching out into the miles, only and always the enormous silence of the sea, spreading out a thousand miles every way into the everlasting, brooding night. And not a light anywhere, out on all the waste of waters; nor ever a sound, as I have told, except the faint moaning of the masts and gear, as they chafe and whine a little to the occasional invisible roll of the ship.

And suddenly, across all this silence, I heard Jensen's voice from the head of the starboard steps, say:—

"Did you hear *that*, Duprey?"

"What?" I asked, cocking my head up. But as I questioned, I heard what he heard—the constant sound of running water, for all the world like the noise of a brook running down a hill-side. And the queer sound was surely not a hundred fathoms off our port bow!

"By gum!" said Jensen's voice, out of the darkness. "That's damned sort of funny!"

"Shut up!" I whispered, and went across, in my bare feet, to the port rail, where I leaned out into the darkness, and stared towards the curious sound.

The noise of a brook running down a hill-side continued, where there was no brook for a thousand sea-miles in any direction.

"What is it?" said Jensen's voice again, scarcely above a whisper now. From below him, on the main-deck, there came several voices questioning:— "Hark!" "Stow the talk!" ". . . there!"

Digitized by Google

"Listen!" "Lord love us, what is it?" . . . And then Jensen muttering to them to be quiet.

There followed a full minute, during which we all heard the brook, where no brook could ever run; and then, out of the night there came a sudden hoarse incredible sound:—ooaaze, oooaze, arrrr, arrrr, oooaze—a stupendous sort of croak, deep and somehow abominable, out of the blackness. In the same instant, I found myself sniffing the air. There was a queer rank smell, stealing through the night.

"Forrard there on the look-out!" I heard the mate singing out, away aft. "Forrard there! What the blazes are you doing!"

I heard him come clattering down the port ladder from the poop, and then the sound of his feet at a run along the main-deck. Simultaneously, there was a thudding of bare feet, as the watch below came racing out of the fo'cas'le beneath me.

"Now then! Now then! Now then!" shouted the Mate, as he charged up on to the fo'cas'le head. "What's up?"

"It's something off the port bow, Sir," I said. "Running water! And then that sort of howl. . . . Your night-glasses," I suggested.

"Can't see a thing," he growled, as he stared away through the dark. "There's a sort of mist. Phoo! what a devil of a stink!"

"Look!" said someone down on the main-deck. "What's that?"

I saw it in the same instant, and caught the Mate's elbow.

"Look, Sir," I said. "There's a light there, about three points off the bow. It's moving."

Digitized by Google

The Mate was staring through his night-glasses, and suddenly he thrust them into my hands:—

"See if you can make it out," he said, and forthwith put his hands round his mouth, and bellowed into the night:—"Ahoy there! Ahoy there! Ahoy there!" his voice going out lost into the silence and darkness all around. But there came never a comprehensible answer, only all the time the infernal noise of a brook running out there on the sea, a thousand miles from any brook of earth; and away on the port bow, a vague shapeless shining.

I put the glasses to my eyes, and stared. The light was bigger and brighter, seen through the binoculars; but I could make nothing of it, only a dull, elongated shining, that moved vaguely in the darkness, apparently a hundred fathoms or so, away on the sea.

"Ahoy there! Ahoy there!" sung out the Mate again. Then, to the men below:—"Quiet there on the main-deck!"

There followed about a minute of intense stillness, during which we all listened; but there was no sound, except the constant noise of water running steadily.

I was watching the curious shining, and I saw it flick out suddenly at the Mate's shout. Then in a moment I saw three dull lights, one under the other, that flicked in and out intermittently.

"Here, give me the glasses!" said the Mate, and grabbed them from me.

He stared intensely for a moment; then swore, and turned to me:—

Digitized by Google

"What do you make of them?" he asked, abruptly.

"I don't know, Sir," I said. "I'm just puzzled. Perhaps it's electricity, or something of that sort."

"Oh hell!" he replied, and leant far out over the rail, staring. "Lord!" he said, for the second time, "what a stink!"

As he spoke, there came a most extraordinary thing; for there sounded a series of heavy reports out of the darkness, seeming in the silence, almost as loud as the sound of small cannon.

"They're shooting!" shouted a man on the main-deck, suddenly.

The Mate said nothing; only he sniffed violently at the night air. "By Gum!" he muttered, "what is it?"

I put my hand over my nose; for there was a terrible, charnel-like stench filling all the night about us.

"Take my glasses, Duprey," said the Mate, after a few minutes further watching. "Keep an eye over yonder. I'm going to call the Captain."

He pushed his way down the ladder, and hurried aft. About five minutes later, he returned forrard with the Captain and the Second and Third Mates, all in their shirts and trousers.

"Anything fresh, Duprey?" asked the Mate.

"No, Sir," I said, and handed him back his glasses. "The lights have gone again, and I think the mist is thicker. There's still the sound of running water out there."

The Captain and the three Mates stood some time along the port rail of the fo'cas'le head, watching

Digitized by Google

through their night-glasses, and listening. Twice the Mate hailed; but there came no reply.

There was some talk, among the officers; and I gathered that the Captain was thinking of investigating.

"Clear one of the life-boats, Mr. Gelt," he said, at last. "The glass is steady; there'll be no wind for hours yet. Pick out half a dozen men. Take 'em out of either watch, if they want to come. I'll be back when I've got my coat."

"Away aft with you, Duprey, and some of you others," said the Mate. "Get the cover off the port life-boat, and bail her out."

"'i, 'i, Sir," I answered, and went away aft with the others.

We had the boat into the water within twenty minutes, which is good time for a wind-jammer, where boats are generally used as storage receptacles for odd gear.

I was one of the men told off to the boat, with two others from our watch, and one from the starboard.

The Captain came down the end of the main tops'l halyards into the boat, and the Third after him. The Third took the tiller, and gave orders to cast off.

We pulled out clear of our vessel, and the Skipper told us to lie on our oars for a moment while he took his bearings. He leant forward to listen, and we all did the same. The sound of the running water was quite distinct across the quietness; but it struck me as seeming not so loud as earlier.

I remember now, that I noticed how plain the mist had become—a sort of warm, wet mist; not a bit

Digitized by Google

thick; but just enough to make the night very dark, and to be visible, eddying slowly in a thin vapour round the port side-light, looking like a red cloudiness swirling lazily through the red glow of the big lamp.

There was no other sound at this time, beyond the sound of the running water; and the Captain, after handing something to the Third Mate, gave the order to give-way.

I was rowing stroke, and close to the officers, and so was able to see dimly that the Captain had passed a heavy revolver over to the Third Mate.

"Ho!" I thought to myself, "so the Old Man's a notion there's really something dangerous over there."

I slipped a hand quickly behind me, and felt that my sheath knife was clear.

We pulled easily for about three or four minutes, with the sound of the water growing plainer somewhere ahead in the darkness; and astern of us, a vague red glowing through the night and vapour, showed where our vessel was lying.

We were rowing easily, when suddenly the bow-oar muttered "G'lord!" Immediately afterwards, there was a loud splashing in the water on his side of the boat.

"What's wrong in the bows, there?" asked the Skipper, sharply.

"There's somethin' in the water, Sir, messing round my oar," said the man.

I stopped rowing, and looked round. All the men did the same. There was a further sound of splashing, and the water was driven right over

Digitized by Google

the boat in showers. Then the bow-oar called out:—"There's somethin' got a holt of my oar, Sir!"

I could tell the man was frightened; and I knew suddenly that a curious nervousness had come to me—a vague, uncomfortable dread, such as the memory of an ugly tale will bring, in a lonesome place. I believe every man in the boat had a similar feeling. It seemed to me in that moment, that a definite, muggy sort of silence was all round us, and this in spite of the sound of the splashing, and the strange noise of the running water somewhere ahead of us on the dark sea.

"It's let go the oar, Sir!" said the man.

Abruptly, as he spoke, there came the Captain's voice in a roar:—"Back water all!" he shouted. "Put some beef into it now! Back all! Back all! . . . Why the devil was no lantern put in the boat! Back now! Back! Back!"

We backed fiercely, with a will; for it was plain that the Old Man had some good reason to get the boat away pretty quickly. He was right, too; though, whether it was guess-work, or some kind of instinct that made him shout out at that moment, I don't know; only I am sure he could not have seen anything in that absolute darkness.

As I was saying, he was right in shouting to us to back; for we had not backed more than half a dozen fathoms, when there was a tremendous splash right ahead of us, as if a house had fallen into the sea; and a regular wave of sea-water came at us out of the darkness, throwing our bows up, and soaking us fore and aft.

Digitized by Google

"Good Lord!" I heard the Third Mate gasp out. "What the devil's that?"

"Back all! Back! Back!" the Captain sung out again.

After some moments, he had the tiller put over, and told us to pull. We gave way with a will, as you may think, and in a few minutes were alongside our own ship again.

"Now then, men," the Captain said, when we were safe aboard, "I'll not order any of you to come; but after the steward's served out a tot of grog each, those who are willing, can come with me, and we'll have another go at finding out what devil's work is going on over yonder."

He turned to the Mate, who had been asking questions:—

"Say, Mister," he said, "it's no sort of thing to let the boat go without a lamp aboard. Send a couple of the lads into the lamp locker, and pass out a couple of the anchor-lights, and that deck bull's-eye, you use at nights for clearing up the ropes."

He whipped round on the Third:—"Tell the steward to buck up with that grog, Mr. Andrews," he said, "and while you're there, pass out the axes from the rack in my cabin."

The grog came along a minute later; and then the Third Mate with three big axes from out the cabin rack.

"Now then, men," said the Skipper, as we took our tots off, "those who are coming with me, had better take an axe each from the Third Mate. They're mighty good weapons in any sort of trouble."

Digitized by Google

We all stepped forward, and he burst out laughing, slapping his thigh.

"That's the kind of thing I like!" he said. "Mr. Andrews, the axes won't go round. Pass out that old cutlass from the steward's pantry. It's a pretty hefty piece of iron!"

The old cutlass was brought, and the man who was short of an axe, collared it. By this time, two of the 'prentices had filled (at least we supposed they had filled them!) two of the ship's anchor-lights; also they had brought out the bull's-eye lamp we used when clearing up the ropes on a dark night. With the lights and the axes and the cutlass, we felt ready to face anything, and down we went again into the boat, with the Captain and the Third Mate after us.

"Lash one of the lamps to one of the boat-hooks, and rig it out over the bows," ordered the Captain.

This was done, and in this way the light lit up the water for a couple of fathoms ahead of the boat; and made us feel less that something could come at us without our knowing. Then the painter was cast off, and we gave way again toward the sound of the running water, out there in the darkness.

I remember now that it struck me that our vessel had drifted a bit; for the sounds seemed farther away.

The second anchor-light had been put in the stern of the boat, and the Third Mate kept it between his feet, while he steered. The Captain had the bull's-eye in his hand, and was pricking up the wick with his pocket-knife.

As we pulled, I took a glance or two over my shoulder; but could see nothing, except the lamp

Digitized by Google

making a yellow halo in the mist round the boat's bows, as we forged ahead. Astern of us, on our quarter, I could see the dull red glow of our vessel's port light. That was all, and not a sound in all the sea, as you might say, except the roll of our oars in the rowlocks, and somewhere in the darkness ahead, that curious noise of water running steadily; now sounding, as I have said, fainter and seeming farther away.

"It's got my oar again, Sir!" exclaimed the man at the bow oar, suddenly, and jumped to his feet. He hove his oar up with a great splashing of water, into the air, and immediately something whirled and beat about in the yellow halo of light over the bows of the boat. There was a crash of breaking wood, and the boat-hook was broken. The lamp soused down into the sea, and was lost. Then, in the darkness, there was a heavy splash, and a shout from the bow-oar:— "It's gone, Sir. It's loosed off the oar!"

"Vast pulling, all!" sung out the Skipper. Not that the order was necessary; for not a man was pulling. He had jumped up, and whipped a big revolver out of his coat pocket.

He had this in his right hand, and the bull's-eye in his left. He stepped forrard smartly over the oars from thwart to thwart, till he reached the bows, where he shone his light down into the water.

"My word!" he said. "Lord in Heaven! Saw anyone ever the like!"

And I doubt whether any man ever did see what we saw then; for the water was thick and living for yards round the boat with the hugest eels I ever saw before or after.

Digitized by Google

"Give way, men," said the Skipper, after a minute. "Yon's no explanation of the almighty queer sounds out yonder we're hearing this night. Give way, lads!"

He stood right up in the bows of the boat, shining his bull's-eye from side to side, and flashing it down on the water.

"Give way, lads!" he said again. "They don't like the light, that'll keep them from the oars. Give way steady now. Mr. Andrews, keep her dead on for the noise out yonder."

We pulled for some minutes, during which I felt my oar plucked at twice; but a flash of the Captain's lamp seemed sufficient to make the brutes loose hold.

The noise of the water running, appeared now quite near-sounding. About this time, I had a sense again of an added sort of silence to all the natural quietness of the sea. And I had a return of the curious nervousness that had touched me before. I kept listening intensely, as if I expected to hear some other sound than the noise of the water. It came to me suddenly that I had the kind of feeling one has in the aisle of a large cathedral. There was a sort of echo in the night—an incredibly faint reduplicating of the noise of our oars.

"Hark!" I said, audibly; not realising at first that I was speaking aloud. "There's an echo——"

"That's it!" the Captain cut in, sharply. "I thought I heard something rummy!"

. . ."I thought I heard something rummy," said a thin ghostly echo, out of the night . . . "thought I heard something rummy" . . . "heard something

Digitized by Google

rummy." The words went muttering and whispering to and fro in the night about us, in rather a horrible fashion.

"Good Lord!" said the Old Man, in a whisper.

We had all stopped rowing, and were staring about us into the thin mist that filled the night. The Skipper was standing with the bull's-eye lamp held over his head, circling the beam of light round from port to starboard, and back again.

Abruptly, as he did so, it came to me that the mist was thinner. The sound of the running water was very near; but it gave back no echo.

"The water doesn't echo, Sir," I said. "That's dam funny!"

"That's dam funny," came back at me, from the darkness to port and starboard, in a multitudinous muttering. . . . "Dam funny! . . . funny . . . eeey!"

"Give way!" said the Old Man, loudly. "I'll bottom this!"

"I'll bottom this. . . . Bottom this . . . this!" The echo came back in a veritable rolling of unexpected sound. And then we had dipped our oars again, and the night was full of the reiterated rolling echoes of our rowlocks.

Suddenly the echoes ceased, and there was, strangely, the sense of a great space about us, and in the same moment the sound of the water running, appeared to be directly before us, but somehow up in the air.

"Vast rowing!" said the Captain, and we lay on our oars, staring round into the darkness ahead. The Old Man swung the beam of his lamp upwards,

Digitized by Google

making circles with it in the night, and abruptly I saw something looming vaguely through the thinner-seeming mist.

"Look, Sir," I called to the Captain. "Quick, Sir, your light right above you! There's something up there!"

The Old Man flashed his lamp upwards, and found the thing I had seen. But it was too indistinct to make anything of, and even as he saw it, the darkness and mist seemed to wrap it about.

"Pull a couple of strokes, all!" said the Captain. "Stow your talk, there in the boat! . . . Again! . . . That'll do! Vast pulling!"

He was sending the beam of his lamp constantly across that part of the night where we had seen the thing, and suddenly I saw it again.

"There, Sir!" I said, quickly. "A little to starboard with the light."

He flicked the light swiftly to the right, and immediately we all saw the thing plainly—a strangely-made mast, standing up there out of the mist, and looking like no spar I had ever seen.

It seemed now that the mist must lie pretty low on the sea in places; for the mast stood up out of it plainly for several fathoms; but, lower, it was hidden in the mist, which, I thought, seemed heavier now all round us; but thinner, as I have said, above.

"Ship ahoy!" sung out the Skipper, suddenly. "Ship ahoy, there!" But for some moments there came never a sound back to us except the constant noise of the water running, not a score yards away; and then, it seemed to me that a vague echo beat back

Digitized by Google

at us out of the mist, oddly:—"Ahoy! Ahoy! Ahoy!"

"There's something hailing us, Sir," said the Third Mate.

Now, that "something" was significant. It showed the sort of feeling that was on us all.

"That's na ship's mast as ever I've seen!" I heard the man next to me mutter. "It's got a unnatcheral look."

"Ahoy there!" shouted the Skipper again, at the top of his voice. "Ahoy there!"

With the suddenness of a clap of thunder there burst out at us a vast, grunting:—oooaze; arrrr; arrrr; oooaze—a volume of sound so great that it seemed to make the loom of the oar in my hand vibrate.

"Good Lord!" said the Captain, and levelled his revolver into the mist; but he did not fire.

I had loosed one hand from my oar, and gripped my axe. I remember thinking that the Skipper's pistol wouldn't be much use against whatever thing made a noise like that.

"It wasn't ahead, Sir," said the Third Mate, abruptly, from where he sat and steered. "I think it came from somewhere over to starboard."

"Damn this mist!" said the Skipper. "Damn it! What a devil of a stink! Pass that other anchor-light forrard."

I reached for the lamp, and handed it to the next man, who passed it on.

"The other boat-hook," said the Skipper; and when he'd got it, he lashed the lamp to the hook end, and then lashed the whole arrangement upright

Digitized by Google

in the bows, so that the lamp was well above his head.

"Now," he said. "Give way gently! And stand by to back-water, if I tell you. . . . Watch my hand, Mister," he added to the Third Mate. "Steer as I tell you."

"We rowed a dozen slow strokes, and with every stroke, I took a look over my shoulder. The Captain was leaning forward under the big lamp, with the bull's-eye in one hand and his revolver in the other. He kept flashing the beam of the lantern up into the night.

"Good Lord!" he said, suddenly. "Vast pulling."

We stopped, and I slewed round on the thwart, and stared.

He was standing up under the glow of the anchor-light, and shining the bull's-eye up at a great mass that loomed dully through the mist. As he flicked the light to and fro over the great bulk, I realised that the boat was within some three or four fathoms of the hull of a vessel.

"Pull another stroke," the Skipper said, in a quiet voice, after a few moments of silence. "Gently now! Gently! . . . Vast pulling!"

I slewed round again on my thwart and stared. I could see part of the thing quite distinctly now, and more of it, as I followed the beam of the Captain's lantern. She was a vessel right enough; but such a vessel as I had never seen. She was extraordinarily high out of the water, and seemed very short, and rose up into a queer mass at one end. But what puzzled me more, I think, than anything else, was the queer

Digitized by Google

look of her sides, down which water was streaming all the time.

"That explains the sound of the water running," I thought to myself; "but what on earth is she built of?"

You will understand a little of my bewildered feelings, when I tell you that as the beam of the Captain's lamp shone on the side of this queer vessel, it showed stone everywhere—as if she were built out of stone. I never felt so dumb-founded in my life.

"She's stone, Cap'n!" I said. "Look at her, Sir!"

I realised, as I spoke, a certain horribleness, of the unnatural. . . . A stone ship, floating out there in the night in the midst of the lonely Atlantic!

"She's stone," I said again, in that absurd way in which one reiterates, when one is bewildered.

"Look at the slime on her!" muttered the man next but one forrard of me. "She's a proper Davy Jones ship. By gum! she stinks like a corpse!"

"Ship ahoy!" roared the Skipper, at the top of his voice. "Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!"

His shout beat back at us, in a curious, dank, yet metallic, echo, something the way one's voice sounds in an old disused quarry.

"There's no one aboard there, Sir," said the Third Mate. "Shall I put the boat alongside?"

"Yes, shove her up, Mister," said the Old Man. "I'll bottom this business. Pull a couple of strokes, aft there! In bow, and stand by to fend off."

The Third Mate laid the boat alongside, and we unshipped our oars. Then, I leant forward over the side of the boat, and pressed the flat of my hand upon

Digitized by Google

the stark side of the ship. The water that ran down her side, sprayed out over my hand and wrist in a cataract; but I did not think about being wet, for my hand was pressed solid upon stone. . . . I pulled my hand back with a queer feeling.

"She's stone, right enough, Sir," I said to the Captain.

"We'll soon see what she is," he said. "Shove your oar up against her side, and shin up. We'll pass the lamp up to you as soon as you're aboard. Shove your axe in the back of your belt. I'll cover you with my gun, till you're aboard."

"'i, 'i, Sir," I said; though I felt a bit funny at the thought of having to be the first aboard that dam rummy craft.

I put my oar upright against her side, and took a spring up it from the thwart, and in a moment I was grabbing over my head for her rail, with every rag on me soaked through with the water that was streaming down her, and spraying out over the oar and me.

I got a firm grip of the rail, and hoisted my head high enough to look over; but I could see nothing . . . what with the darkness, and the water in my eyes.

I knew it was no time for going slow, if there were danger aboard; so I went in over that rail in one spring, my boots coming down with a horrible, ringing, hollow stony sound on her decks. I whipped the water out of my eyes and the axe out of my belt, all in the same moment; then I took a good stare fore and aft; but it was too dark to see anything.

"Come along, Duprey!" shouted the Skipper. "Collar the lamp."

I leant out sideways over the rail, and grabbed for

Digitized by Google

the lamp with my left hand, keeping the axe ready in my right, and staring inboard; for I tell you, I was just mortally afraid in that moment of what might be aboard of her.

I felt the lamp-ring with my left hand, and gripped it. Then I switched it aboard, and turned fair and square to see where I'd gotten.

Now, you never saw such a packet as that, not in a hundred years, nor yet two hundred, I should think. She'd got a rum little main-deck, about forty feet long, and then came a step about two feet high, and another bit of a deck, with a little house on it.

That was the after end of her; and more I couldn't see, because the light of my lamp went no farther, except to show me vaguely the big, cocked-up stern of her, going up into the darkness. I never saw a vessel made like her; not even in an old picture of old-time ships.

Forrard of me, was her mast—a big lump of a stick it was too, for her size. And here was another amazing thing, the mast of her looked just solid stone.

"Funny, isn't she, Duprey?" said the Skipper's voice at my back, and I came round on him with a jump.

"Yes," I said. "I'm puzzled. Aren't you, Sir?"

"Well," he said, "I am. If we were like the shellbacks they talk of in books, we'd be crossing ourselves. But, personally, give me a good heavy Colt, or the hefty chunk of steel you're cuddling."

He turned from me, and put his head over the rail.

"Pass up the painter, Jales," he said, to the bow-oar. Then to the Third Mate:—

Digitized by Google

"Bring 'em all up, Mister. If there's going to be anything rummy, we may as well make a picnic party of the lot. . . . Hitch that painter round the cleet yonder, Duprey," he added to me. "It looks good solid stone! . . . That's right. Come along."

He swung the thin beam of his lantern fore and aft, and then forrard again.

"Lord!" he said. "Look at that mast. It's stone. Give it a whack with the back of your axe, man; only remember she's apparently a bit of an old-timer! So go gently."

I took my axe short, and tapped the mast, and it rang dull, and solid, like a stone pillar. I struck it again, harder, and a sharp flake of stone flew past my cheek. The Skipper thrust his lantern close up to where I'd struck the mast.

"By George," he said, "she's absolutely a stone ship—solid stone, afloat here out of Eternity, in the middle of the wide Atlantic. . . . Why! She must weigh a thousand tons more than she's buoyancy to carry. It's just impossible. . . . It's——"

He turned his head quickly, at a sound in the darkness along the decks. He flashed his light that way, across and across the after decks; but we could see nothing.

"Get a move on you in the boat!" he said sharply, stepping to the rail and looking down. "For once I'd really prefer a little more of your company. . . ." He came round like a flash. "Duprey, what was that?" he asked in a low voice.

"I certainly heard something, Sir," I said. "I wish the others would hurry. By Jove! Look! What's that——"

Digitized by Google

"Where?" he said, and sent the beam of his lamp to where I pointed with my axe.

"There's nothing," he said, after circling the light all over the deck. "Don't go imagining things. There's enough solid unnatural fact here, without trying to add to it."

There came the splash and thud of feet behind, as the first of the men came up over the side, and jumped clumsily into the lee scuppers, which had water in them. You see she had a cant to that side, and I supposed the water had collected there.

The rest of the men followed, and then the Third Mate. That made six men of us, all well armed; and I felt a bit more comfortable, as you can think.

"Hold up that lamp of yours, Duprey, and lead the way," said the Skipper. "You're getting the post of honour this trip!"

"'i, 'i, Sir," I said, and stepped forward, holding up the lamp in my left hand, and carrying my axe half way down the haft, in my right.

"We'll try aft, first," said the Captain, and led the way himself, flashing the bull's-eye to and fro. At the raised portion of the deck, he stopped.

"Now," he said, in his queer way, "let's have a look at this. . . . Tap it with your axe, Duprey. . . . Ah!" he added, as I hit it with the back of my axe. "That's what we call stone at home, right enough. She's just as rum as anything I've seen while I've been fishing. We'll go on aft and have a peep into the deck-house. Keep your axes handy, men."

We walked slowly up to the curious little house, the deck rising to it with quite a slope. At the foreside of the little deck-house, the Captain pulled

Digitized by Google

up, and shone his bull's-eye down at the deck. I saw that he was looking at what was plainly the stump of the after mast. He stepped closer to it, and kicked it with his foot; and it gave out the same dull, solid note that the foremast had done. It was obviously a chunk of stone.

I held up my lamp so that I could see the upper part of the house more clearly. The fore-part had two square window-spaces in it; but there was no glass in either of them; and the blank darkness within the queer little place, just seemed to stare out at us.

And then I saw something suddenly . . . a great shaggy head of red hair was rising slowly into sight, through the port window, the one nearest to us.

"My God! What's that, Cap'n?" I called out. But it was gone, even as I spoke.

"What?" he asked, jumping at the way I had sung out.

"At the port window, Sir," I said. "A great red-haired head. It came right up to the window-place; and then it went in a moment."

The Skipper stepped right up to the little dark window, and pushed his lantern through into the blackness. He flashed the light round; then withdrew the lantern.

"Bosh, man!" he said. "That's twice you've got fancying things. Ease up your nerves a bit!"

"I did see it!" I said, almost angrily. "It was like a great red-haired head. . . ."

"Stow it, Duprey!" he said, though not sneeringly. "The house is absolutely empty. Come round to the door, if the Infernal Masons that built her, went in for doors! Then you'll see for yourself. All

Digitized by Google

the same, keep your axes ready, lads. I've a notion there's something pretty queer aboard here."

We went up round the after-end of the little house, and here we saw what appeared to be a door.

The Skipper felt at the queer, odd-shapen handle, and pushed at the door; but it had stuck fast.

"Here, one of you!" he said, stepping back. "Have a whack at this with your axe. Better use the back."

One of the men stepped forward, and we stood away to give him room. As his axe struck, the door went to pieces with exactly the same sound that a thin slab of stone would make, when broken.

"Stone!" I heard the Captain mutter, under his breath. "By Gum! What *is* she?"

I did not wait for the Skipper. He had put me a bit on edge, and I stepped bang in through the open doorway, with the lamp high, and holding my axe short and ready; but there was nothing in the place, save a stone seat running all round, except where the doorway opened on to the deck.

"Find your red-haired monster?" asked the Skipper, at my elbow.

I said nothing. I was suddenly aware that he was all on the jump with some inexplicable fear. I saw his glance going everywhere about him. And then his eye caught mine, and he saw that I realised. He was a man almost callous to fear, that is the fear of danger in what I might call any normal sea-faring shape. And this palpable nerviness affected me tremendously. He was obviously doing his best to throttle it; and trying all he knew to hide it. I had a sudden warmth of understanding for him, and

Digitized by Google

dreaded lest the men should realise his state. Funny that I should be able at that moment to be aware of anything but my own bewildered fear and expectancy of intruding upon something monstrous at any instant. Yet I describe exactly my feelings, as I stood there in the house.

"Shall we try below, Sir?" I said, and turned to where a flight of stone steps led down into an utter blackness, out of which rose a strange, dank scent of the sea . . . an imponderable mixture of brine and darkness.

"The worthy Duprey leads the van!" said the Skipper; but I felt no irritation now. I knew that he must cover his fright, until he had got control again; and I think he felt, somehow, that I was backing him up. I remember now that I went down those stairs into that unknowable and ancient cabin, as much aware in that moment of the Captain's state, as of that extraordinary thing I had just seen at the little window, or of my own half-funk of what we might see any moment.

The Captain was at my shoulder, as I went, and behind him came the Third Mate, and then the men, all in single file; for the stairs were narrow.

I counted seven steps down, and then my foot splashed into water on the eighth. I held the lamp low, and stared. I had caught no glimpse of a reflection, and I saw now that this was owing to a curious, dull, greyish scum that lay thinly on the water, seeming to match the colour of the stone which composed the steps and bulksheads.

"Stop!" I said. "I'm in water!"

I let my foot down slowly, and got the next step.

Digitized by Google

Then sounded with my axe, and found the floor at the bottom. I stepped down and stood up to my thighs in water.

"It's all right, Sir," I said, suddenly whispering. I held my lamp up, and glanced quickly about me. "It's not deep. There's two doors here. . . ."

I whirled my axe up as I spoke; for, suddenly, I had realised that one of the doors was open a little. It seemed to move, as I stared, and I could have imagined that a vague undulation ran towards me, across the dull scum-covered water.

"The door's opening!" I said, aloud, with a sudden sick feeling. "Look out!"

I backed from the door, staring; but nothing came. And abruptly, I had control of myself; for I realised that the door was not moving. It had not moved at all. It was simply ajar.

"It's all right, Sir," I said. "It's not opening."

I stepped forward again a pace towards the doors, as the Skipper and the Third Mate came down with a jump, splashing the water all over me.

The Captain still had the "nerves" on him, as I think I could feel, even then; but he hid it well.

"Try the door, Mister. I've jumped my dam lamp out!" he growled to the Third Mate; who pushed at the door on my right; but it would not open beyond the nine or ten inches it was fixed ajar.

"There's this one here, Sir," I whispered, and held my lantern up to the closed door that lay to my left.

"Try it," said the Skipper, in an undertone. We did so, but it also was fixed. I whirled my axe suddenly, and struck the door heavily in the centre of the main panel, and the whole thing crashed into

Digitized by Google

flinders of stone, that went with hollow sounding splashes into the darkness beyond.

"Goodness!" said the Skipper, in a startled voice; for my action had been so instant and unexpected. He covered his lapse, in a moment, by the warning:—

"Look out for bad air!" But I was already inside with the lamp, and holding my axe handily. There was no bad air; for right across from me, was a split clean through the ship's side, that I could have put my two arms through, just above the level of the scummy water.

The place I had broken into, was a cabin, of a kind; but seemed strange and dank, and too narrow to breathe in; and wherever I turned, I saw stone. The Third Mate and the Skipper gave simultaneous expressions of disgust at the wet dismalness of the place.

"It's all stone," I said, and brought my axe hard against the front of a sort of squat cabinet, which was built into the after bulkshead. It caved in, with a crash of splintered stone.

"Empty!" I said, and turned instantly away.

The Skipper and the Third Mate, with the men who were now peering in at the door, crowded out; and in that moment, I pushed my axe under my arm, and thrust my hand into the burst stone-chest. Twice I did this, with almost the speed of lightning, and shoved what I had seen, into the side-pocket of my coat. Then, I was following the others; and not one of them had noticed a thing. As for me, I was quivering with excitement, so that my knees shook; for I had caught the unmistakable gleam of gems; and had grabbed for them in that one swift instant.

I wonder whether anyone can realise what I felt in

Digitized by Google

that moment. I knew that, if my guess were right, I had snatched the power in that one miraculous moment, that would lift me from the weary life of a common shellback, to the life of ease that had been mine during my early years. I tell you, in that instant, as I staggered almost blindly out of that dark little apartment, I had no thought of any horror that might be held in that incredible vessel, out there afloat on the wide Atlantic.

I was full of the one blinding thought, that possibly I was *rich!* And I wanted to get somewhere by myself as soon as possible, to see whether I was right. Also, if I could, I meant to get back to that strange cabinet of stone, if the chance came; for I knew that the two handfuls I had grabbed, had left a lot behind.

Only, whatever I did, I must let no one guess; for then I should probably lose everything, or have but an infinitesimal share doled out to me, of the wealth that I believed to be in those glittering things there in the side-pocket of my coat.

I began immediately to wonder what other treasures there might be aboard; and then, abruptly, I realised that the Captain was speaking to me:—

"The light, Duprey, damn you!" he was saying, angrily, in a low tone. "What's the matter with you! Hold it up."

I pulled myself together, and shoved the lamp above my head. One of the men was swinging his axe, to beat in the door that seemed to have stood so eternally ajar; and the rest were standing back, to give him room. Crash! went the axe, and half the door fell inward, in a shower of broken stone, making dismal splashes in the darkness. The man struck

Digitized by Google

again, and the rest of the door fell away, with a sullen slump into the water.

"The lamp," muttered the Captain. But I had hold of myself once more, and I was stepping forward slowly through the thigh-deep water, even before he spoke.

I went a couple of paces in through the black gape of the doorway, and then stopped and held the lamp so as to get a view of the place. As I did so, I remember how the intense silence struck home on me. Every man of us must surely have been holding his breath; and there must have been some heavy quality, either in the water, or in the scum that floated on it, that kept it from rippling against the sides of the bulksheads, with the movements we had made.

At first, as I held the lamp (which was burning badly), I could not get its position right to show me anything, except that I was in a very large cabin for so small a vessel. Then I saw that a table ran along the centre, and the top of it was no more than a few inches above the water. On each side of it, there rose the backs of what were evidently two rows of massive, olden looking chairs. At the far end of the table, there was a huge, immobile, humped something.

I stared at this for several moments; then I took three slow steps forward, and stopped again; for the thing resolved itself, under the light from the lamp, into the figure of an enormous man, seated at the end of the table, his face bowed forward upon his arms. I was amazed, and thrilling abruptly with new fears and vague impossible thoughts. Without moving a step, I held the light nearer at arm's length. . . .

Digitized by Google

The man was of stone, like everything in that extraordinary ship.

"That foot!" said the Captain's voice, suddenly cracking. "Look at that foot!" His voice sounded amazingly startling and hollow in that silence, and the words seemed to come back sharply at me from the vaguely seen bulksheads.

I whipped my light to starboard, and saw what he meant—a huge human foot was sticking up out of the water, on the right hand side of the table. It was enormous. I have never seen so vast a foot. And it also was of stone.

And then, as I stared, I saw that there was a great head above the water, over by the bulkshead.

"I've gone mad!" I said, out loud, as I saw something else, more incredible.

"My God! Look at the hair on the head!" said the Captain.... "It's growing! It's growing!" His voice cracked again.

"Look at it! It's growing!" he called out once more.

I was looking. On the great head, there was becoming visible a huge mass of red hair, that was surely and unmistakably rising up, as we watched it.

"It's what I saw at the window!" I said. "It's what I saw at the window! I told you I saw it!"

"Come out of that, Duprey," said the Third Mate, quietly.

"Let's get out of here!" muttered one of the men. Two or three of them called out the same thing; and then, in a moment, they began a mad rush up the stairway.

I stood dumb, where I was. The hair rose up in a

Digitized by Google

horrible living fashion on the great head, waving and moving. It rippled down over the forehead, and spread abruptly over the whole gargantuan stone face, hiding the features completely. Suddenly, I swore at the thing madly, and I hove my axe at it. Then I was backing crazily for the door, slumping the scum as high as the deck-beams, in my fierce haste. I reached the stairs, and caught at the stone rail, that was modelled like a rope; and so hove myself up out of the water. I reached the little deck-house, where I had seen the great head of hair. I jumped through the doorway, out on to the decks, and I felt the night air sweet on my face. . . . Goodness! I ran forward along the decks. There was a Babel of shouting in the waist of the ship, and a thudding of feet running. Some of the men were singing out, to get into the boat; but the Third Mate was shouting that they must wait for me.

"He's coming," called someone. And then I was among them.

"Turn that lamp up, you idiot," said the Captain's voice. "This is just where we want light!"

I glanced down, and realised that my lamp was almost out. I turned it up, and it flared, and began again to dwindle.

"Those damned boys never filled it," I said. "They deserve their necks breaking."

The men were literally tumbling over the side, and the Skipper was hurrying them.

"Down with you into the boat," he said to me. "Give me the lamp. I'll pass it down. Get a move on you!"

The Captain had evidently got his nerve back again.

Digitized by Google

This was more like the man I knew. I handed him the lamp, and went over the side. All the rest had now gone, and the Third Mate was already in the stern, waiting.

As I landed on the thwart, there was a sudden, strange noise from aboard the ship—a sound, as if some stone object were trundling down the sloping decks, from aft. In that one moment, I got what you might truly call the "horrors." I seemed suddenly able to believe incredible possibilities.

"The stone men!" I shouted. "Jump, Captain! Jump! Jump!" The vessel seemed to roll oddly.

Abruptly, the Captain yelled out something, that not one of us in the boat understood. There followed a succession of tremendous sounds, aboard the ship, and I saw his shadow swing out huge against the thin mist, as he turned suddenly with the lamp. He fired twice with his revolver.

"The hair!" I shouted. "Look at the hair!"

We all saw it—the great head of red hair that we had seen grow visibly on the monstrous stone head, below in the cabin. It rose above the rail, and there was a moment of intense stillness, in which I heard the Captain gasping. The Third Mate fired six times at the thing, and I found myself fixing an oar up against the side of that abominable vessel, to get aboard.

As I did so, there came one appalling crash, that shook the stone ship fore and aft, and she began to cant up, and my oar slipped and fell into the boat. Then the Captain's voice screamed something in a choking fashion above us. The ship lurched forward, and paused. Then another crash came, and she

Digitized by Google

rocked over towards us; then away from us again. The movement away from us, continued, and the round of the vessel's bottom showed, vaguely. There was a smashing of glass above us, and the dim glow of light aboard, vanished. Then the vessel fell clean over from us, with a giant splash. A huge wave came at us, out of the night, and half filled the boat.

The boat nearly capsized, then righted and presently steadied.

"Captain!" shouted the Third Mate. "Captain!" But there came never a sound; only presently, out of all the night, a strange murmuring of waters.

"Captain!" he shouted once more; but his voice just went lost and remote into the darkness.

"She's foundered!" I said.

"Out oars," sung out the Third. "Put your backs into it. Don't stop to bail!"

For half an hour we circled the spot slowly. But the strange vessel had indeed foundered and gone down into the mystery of the deep sea, with her mysteries.

Finally we put about, and returned to the *Alfred Jessop*.

Now, I want you to realise that what I am telling you is a plain and simple tale of fact. This is no fairy tale, and I've not done yet; and I think this yarn should prove to you that some mighty strange things do happen at sea, and always will while the world lasts. It's the home of all the mysteries; for it's the one place that is really difficult for humans to investigate. Now just listen:—

The Mate had kept the bell going, from time to

Digitized by Google

time, and so we came back pretty quickly, having as we came, a strange repetition of the echoey reduplication of our oar-sounds; but we never spoke a word; for not one of us wanted to hear those beastly echoes again, after what we had just gone through. I think we all had a feeling that there was something a bit hellish abroad that night.

We got aboard, and the Third explained to the Mate what had happened; but he would hardly believe the yarn. However, there was nothing to do, but wait for daylight; so we were told to keep about the deck, and keep our eyes and ears open.

One thing the Mate did, showed he was more impressed by our yarn, than he would admit. He had all the ship's lanterns lashed up round the decks, to the sheerpoles; and he never told us to give up either the axes or the cutlass.

It was while we were keeping about the decks, that I took the chance to have a look at what I had grabbed. I tell you, what I found, made me nearly forget the Skipper, and all the rummy things that had happened. I had twenty-six stones in my pocket and four of them were diamonds, respectively 9, 11, 13½ and 17 carats in weight, uncut, that is. I know quite something about diamonds. I'm not going to tell you how I learnt what I know; but I would not have taken a thousand pounds for the four, as they lay there, in my hand. There was also a big, dull stone, that looked red inside. I'd have dumped it over the side, I thought so little of it; only, I argued that it must be something, or it would never have been among that lot. Lord! but I little knew what I'd got; not then. Why, the thing was as big as a fair-

Digitized by Google

sized walnut. You may think it funny that I thought of the four diamonds first; but you see, I *know* diamonds when I see them. They're things I understand; but I never saw a ruby, in the rough, before or since. Good Lord! And to think I'd have thought nothing of heaving it over the side!

You see, a lot of the stones were not anything much; that is, not in the modern market. There were two big topaz, and several onyx and cornelians--nothing much. There were five hammered slugs of gold about two ounces each they would be. And then a prize—one winking green devil of an emerald. You've got to know an emerald to look for the "eye" of it, in the rough; but it is there—the eye of some hidden devil staring up at you. Yes, I'd seen an emerald before, and I knew I held a lot of money in that one stone alone.

And then I remembered what I'd missed, and cursed myself for not grabbing a third time. But that feeling lasted only a moment. I thought of the beastly part that had been the Skipper's share; while there I stood safe under one of the lamps, with a fortune in my hands. And then, abruptly, as you can understand, my mind was filled with the crazy wonder and bewilderment of what had happened. I felt how absurdly ineffectual my imagination was to comprehend anything understandable out of it all, except that the Captain had certainly gone, and I had just as certainly had a piece of impossible luck.

Often, during that time of waiting, I stopped to take a look at the things I had in my pocket; always careful that no one about the decks should come near me, to see what I was looking at.

Digitized by Google

Suddenly the Mate's voice came sharp along the decks:—

"Call the doctor, one of you," he said. "Tell him to get the fire in and the coffee made."

"'i, 'i, Sir," said one of the men; and I realised that the dawn was growing vaguely over the sea.

Half an hour later, the "doctor" shoved his head out of the galley doorway, and sung out that coffee was ready.

The watch below turned out, and had theirs with the watch on deck, all sitting along the spar that lay under the port rail.

As the daylight grew, we kept a constant watch over the side; but even now we could see nothing; for the thin mist still hung low on the sea.

"Hear that?" said one of the men, suddenly. And, indeed, the sound must have been plain for half a mile round.

"Ooaaze, ooaaze, arrr, arrrr, oooaze——"

"By George!" said Tallett, one of the other watch; "that's a beastly sort of thing to hear."

"Look!" I said. "What's that out yonder?"

The mist was thinning under the effect of the rising sun, and tremendous shapes seemed to stand towering half-seen, away to port. A few minutes passed, while we stared. Then, suddenly, we heard the Mate's voice:—

"All hands on deck!" he was shouting, along the decks.

I ran aft a few steps.

"Both watches are out, Sir," I called.

"Very good!" said the Mate. "Keep handy all of

Digitized by Google

you. Some of you have got the axes. The rest had better take a caps'n-bar each, and stand-by till I find what this devilment is, out yonder."

"'i, 'i, Sir," I said, and turned forrard. But there was no need to pass on the Mate's orders; for the men had heard, and there was a rush for the capstan-bars, which are a pretty hefty kind of cudgel, as any sailorman knows. We lined the rail again, and stared away to port.

"Look out, you sea-divvils," shouted Timothy Galt a huge Irishman, waving his bar excitedly, and peering over the rail into the mist, which was steadily thinning, as the day grew.

Abruptly there was a simultaneous cry:—"*Rocks!*" shouted everyone.

I never saw such a sight. As at last the mist thinned, we could see them. All the sea to port was literally cut about with far-reaching reefs of rock. In places the reefs lay just submerged; but in others they rose into extraordinary and fantastic rock-spires, and arches, and islands of jagged rock.

"Jehoshaphat!" I heard the Third Mate shout. "Look at that, Mister! Look at that! Lord! how did we take the boat through that, without stoving her!"

Everything was so still for the moment, with all the men just staring and amazed, that I could hear every word come along the decks.

"There's sure been a submarine earthquake somewhere," I heard the First Mate say. "The bottom of the sea's just riz up here, quiet and gentle, during the night; and God's mercy we aren't now a-top of one of those ornaments out there."

Digitized by Google

And then, you know, I saw it all. Everything that had looked mad and impossible, began to be natural; though it was, none the less, all amazing and wonderful.

There had been during the night, a slow lifting of the sea-bottom, owing to some action of the Internal Pressures. The rocks had risen so gently that they had made never a sound; and the stone ship had risen with them out of the deep sea. She had evidently lain on one of the submerged reefs, and so had seemed to us to be just afloat in the sea. And she accounted for the water we heard running. She was naturally bung full, as you might say, and took longer to shed the water than she did to rise. She had probably some biggish holes in her bottom. I began to get my "soundings" a bit, as I might call it in sailor talk. The natural wonders of the sea, beat all made-up yarns that ever were!

The Mate sung out to us to man the boat again, and told the Third Mate to take her out to where we lost the Skipper, and have a final look round, in case there might be any chance to find the Old Man's body anywhere about.

"Keep a man in the bows to look out for sunk rocks, Mister," the Mate told the Third, as we pulled off. "Go slow. There'll be no wind yet awhile. See if you can fix up what made those noises, while you're looking round."

We pulled right across about thirty fathoms of clear water, and in a minute we were between two great arches of rock. It was then I realised that the re-duplicating of our oar-roll was the echo from these on each side of us. Even in the sunlight, it was queer

Digitized by Google

to hear again that same strange cathedral echoey sound that we had heard in the dark.

We passed under the huge arches, all hung with deep sea slime. And presently we were heading straight for a gap, where two low reefs swept in to the apex of a huge horseshoe. We pulled for about three minutes, and then the Third gave the word to vast pulling.

"Take the boat-hook, Duprey," he said, "and go forrard, and see we don't hit anything."

"'i, 'i, Sir," I said, and drew in my oar.

"Give way again gently!" said the Third; and the boat moved forward for another thirty or forty yards.

"We're right on to a reef, Sir," I said, presently, as I stared down over the bows. I sounded with the boat-hook. "There's about three feet of water, Sir," I told him.

"Vast pulling," ordered the Third. "I reckon we are right over the rock, where we found that rum packet last night." He leant over the side, and stared down.

"There's a stone cannon on the rock, right under the bows of the boat," I said. Immediately afterwards I shouted:—

"There's the hair, Sir! There's the hair! It's on the reef. There's two! There's three! There's one on the cannon!"

"All right! All right, Duprey! Keep cool," said the Third Mate. "I can see them. You've enough intelligence not to be superstitious now the whole thing's explained. They're some kind of big hairy sea-caterpillar. Prod one with your boat-hook."

Digitized by Google

I did so; a little ashamed of my sudden bewilderment. The thing whipped round like a tiger, at the boat-hook. It lapped itself round and round the boat-hook, while the hind portions of it kept gripped to the rock, and I could no more pull the boat-hook from its grip, than fly; though I pulled till I sweated.

"Take the point of your cutlass to it, Varley," said the Third Mate. "Jab it through."

The bow-oar did so, and the brute loosed the boat-hook, and curled up round a chunk of rock, looking like a great ball of red hair.

I drew the boat-hook up, and examined it.

"Goodness!" I said. "That's what killed the Old Man—one of those things! Look at all those marks in the wood, where it's gripped it with about a hundred legs."

I passed the boat-hook aft to the Third Mate to look at.

"They're about as dangerous as they can be, Sir, I reckon," I told him. "Makes you think of African centipedes, only these are big and strong enough to kill an elephant, I should think."

"Don't lean all on one side of the boat!" shouted the Third Mate, as the men stared over. "Get back to your places. Give way, there! . . . Keep a good look-out for any signs of the ship or the Captain, Duprey."

For nearly an hour, we pulled to and fro over the reef; but we never saw either the stone ship or the Old Man again. The queer craft must have rolled off into the profound depths that lay on each side of the reef.

As I leant over the bows, staring down all that long

Digitized by Google

while at the submerged rocks, I was able to understand almost everything, except the various extraordinary noises.

The cannon made it unmistakably clear that the ship which had been hove up from the sea-bottom, with the rising of the reef, had been originally a normal enough wooden vessel of a time far removed from our own. At the sea-bottom, she had evidently undergone some natural mineralising process, and this explained her stony appearance. The stone men had been evidently humans who had been drowned in her cabin, and their swollen tissues had been subjected to the same natural process, which, however, had also deposited heavy encrustations upon them, so that their size, when compared with the normal, was prodigious.

The mystery of the hair, I had already discovered; but there remained, among other things, the tremendous bangs we had heard. These were, possibly, explained later, while we were making a final examination of the rocks to the Westward, prior to returning to our ship. Here we discovered the burst and swollen bodies of several extraordinary deep-sea creatures, of the eel variety. They must have had a girth, in life, of many feet, and the one that we measured roughly with an oar, must have been quite forty feet long. They had, apparently, burst on being lifted from the tremendous pressure of the deep sea, into the light air pressure above water, and hence might account for the loud reports we had heard; though, personally, I incline to think these loud bangs were more probably caused by the splitting of the rocks under new stresses.

Digitized by Google

As for the roaring sounds, I can only conclude that they were caused by a peculiar species of grampus-like fish, of enormous size, which we found dead and hugely distended on one of the rocky masses. This fish must have weighed at least four or five tons, and when prodded with a heavy oar, there came from its peculiar snout-shaped mouth, a low, hoarse sound, like a weak imitation of the tremendous sounds we had heard during the past night.

Regarding the apparently carved handrail, like a rope up the side of the cabin stairs, I realise that this had undoubtedly been actual rope at one time.

Recalling the heavy, trundling sounds aboard, just after I climbed down into the boat, I can only suppose that these were made by some stone object, possibly a fossilised gun-carriage, rolling down the decks, as the ship began to slip off the rocks, and her bows sank lower in the water.

The varying lights must have been the strongly phosphorescent bodies of some of the deep-sea creatures, moving about on the upheaved reefs. As for the giant splash that occurred in the darkness ahead of the boat, this must have been due to some large portion of heaved-up rock, overbalancing and rolling back into the sea.

No one aboard ever learnt about the jewels. I took care of that! I sold the ruby badly, so I've heard since; but I do not grumble even now. Twenty-three thousand pounds I had for it alone, from a merchant in London. I learned afterwards he made double that on it; but I don't spoil my pleasure by grumbling. I wonder often how the stones and things came where

Digitized by Google

I found them; but she carried guns, as I've told, I think; and there's rum doings happen at sea; yes, by George!

The smell—oh that I guess was due to heaving all that deep-sea slime up for human noses to smell at.

This yarn is, of course, known in nautical circles, and was briefly mentioned in the old Nautical Mercury of 1879. The series of volcanic reefs (which disappeared in 1883) were charted under the name of the "Alfred Jessop Shoals and Reefs"; being named after our Captain who discovered them and lost his life on them.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE SHIP

And I lift up the tons of thy foam
On my wandering prow
And hurl through the summits of hills,
O world of uproar,
I shiver and bow
Before the great Door of thy Deep
Then I leap
On through thy grim pathless miles
Roaring across thy drifts
And my prow laughs like thunder on thee
Or quietens odd whiles
As the slow mutter pauses and shifts
At the sound of my tread. . .
Ha!
And thou answerest me
With somberest calls
Of long unremembered dead
Out of Unknowable Halls
. . . . Then I dream
And the brine hills are gone
And the moon has risen and shone
And I seem
Only a dream
Afar on thy breast
Stealing onward forever and ever
Through leagues of enchantment and rest
Whilst thy little winds whisper with me
Lost in the gloom of my sails
And there sough, forgotten of gales,
So I go onward forever and ever
Unto my rest.

Digitized by Google

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
RICHARD CLAY AND SONS, LIMITED,
BRUNSWICK STREET, STAMFORD STREET, S.E
AND BUNGAY SUFFOLK.

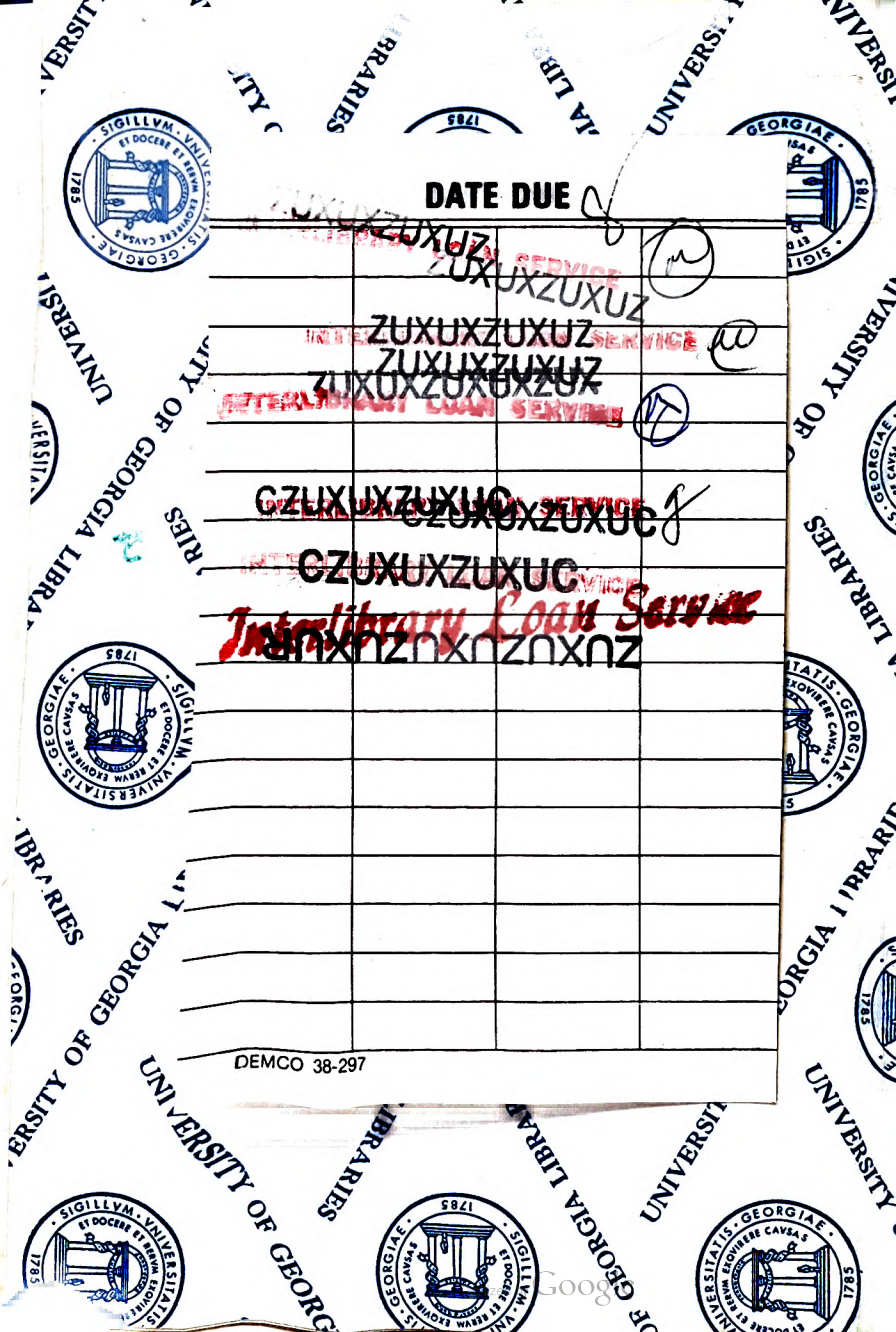
B 102

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google


DATE DUE
ZUXUXZUXUZ
ZUXUXZUXUZ
ZUXUXZUXUZ
CZUXUXZUXUC
CZUXUXZUXUC
Interlibrary Loan Service
DEMCO 38-297

PZ3.H626L8
3 2108 01116 8468
PZ
3
.H626
L8

Digitized by Google